

In his book, presented here in English translation, the author has tried to identify the organising principles of Hindu society, the factors which ensured its continuity for centuries and the forces by which it was ultimately weakened. Only a scholar with wide and diverse interests such as the late Nirmal Kumar Bose owned could have attempted this task single handed. Here he sought to bring together within a single framework approaches practised separately by ethnographers, Indologists and social historians. The result is remarkable.

Andre Betelle's able translation makes the original Bengali material available to a larger readership. He has also provided a valuable introduction in which he analyses the special qualities of Bose's mind and work, especially as illustrated in this book.

The Structure of Hindu Society

During an unusually varied career, Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901-1972) taught Anthropology and Human Geography at Calcutta University, was Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, and later Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. He participated in the Independence movement, went to Jali for nationalist activities and was Mahatma Gandhi's secretary and close companion. His writings cover an equally wide canvas — the paleolithic culture of Mayurbhanj, the material culture of the tribal peoples, Gandhi's work and philosophy, the whole range of Indian society from the simple Juang tribe of Orissa to the complex metropolis of Calcutta. His death marked the end of an epoch in the history of social sciences in India.

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*The Structure
of
Hindu Society*

N. K. Bose (1901- 1972)

Translated from the Bengali
with an introduction and notes by Andre Beteille

The Structure of Hindu Society

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Complete and unabridged translation
of the Bengali work *Hindu Samajer Garan (1949)*

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Publisher's Note

In the social sciences, students and teachers as well as research workers in India have relied almost entirely on works produced originally in one of the European languages, principally English but occasionally also French and German, or English translations of the latter. This literature is now also being made available to a limited extent in translations into one or another Indian language.

So far as scholarly works go, the effort at translation has been almost entirely one sided—the translations are invariably from the European to the Indian languages, unless what is being translated is to be used as data or raw material for research. What is overlooked, often enough by Indians themselves, is that there are works in the Indian languages, few though these may be, to which we might turn not merely for data but also for concepts, methods and theories.

The present volume, essentially a pupil's tribute to a scholar, is a fine example of something that has been accessible so far only to the Bengali reader. In being associated with its publication for a wider audience, we are hopeful that many other such works will follow.

Introduction

by ANDRE BÉTEILLE

THE BOOK presented here in English translation a quarter century after its first appearance in Bengali deserves our attention for a variety of reasons. In it the author has tried to identify the organizing principles of Hindu society, the factors which ensured its continuity for centuries and the forces by which it was ultimately weakened. Such a task must be considered an ambitious one for anyone to undertake single handed, and even if we feel that it has not been fully accomplished here, we must admire the boldness with which it was taken up.

Nirmal Bose thought of himself as first and foremost an anthropologist even when he found himself out of tune with the current concerns of his professional colleagues. Beyond anthropology there extended a larger life of ideas and political experience. Anthropology represented a particular way of testing ideas through a systematic examination of facts. Above all, it meant fieldwork, seeing society as it actually worked, sharing the experiences of people, comparing different experiences and discovering the principles by which they were governed. Bose never hesitated to pursue intellectual problems into unfamiliar domains, but almost always it was some direct observation or experience which provided the inspiration for his intellectual pursuits.

What is truly impressive about this little book is its design. It brings together within a single framework approaches which are ordinarily practised separately by ethnographers, indologists and social historians. Fairly early in his career Bose recognised the enormous scale — in both space and time — of Hindu civilization, and he rightly felt that a proper understanding of it would require

the anthropologist to go beyond the approaches usually applied to the study of tribal communities in North America, Melanesia or Australia. It was in this sense that Bose saw a kinship between his work and that of the American anthropologist, A. L. Kroeber.

Almost a decade after Bose published his work Dumont and Pocock emphasized the need to bring ethnology and indology together in the study of Indian society. It is important to emphasize this need once again. No one who studies even the tiniest segment of Indian society can afford to forget that India is a country of more than 500 million people with a recorded history of nearly three thousand years. This is the broad context within which anthropological fieldwork in India must be placed. In this book Bose uses the experience of his fieldwork to clarify the nature of this context.

Bose realised that it is not enough to show that the insights into Indian civilization gained by studying tribal communities in the field are confirmed by the perspective of indology. For although it is possible to reconstruct the structure of Indian civilization through the twin approaches of ethnology and indology, this structure itself has been undergoing change over the last two hundred years. It is here that the study of social history, particularly during the British period, becomes a vital factor in our understanding of society and culture in India today. I have said that Bose saw himself as being first and foremost an anthropologist, i.e., a 'field scientist'. But as an heir to the Bengal renaissance he could not fail to be sensitive to the classical heritage of Sanskritic ideas, and as a participant in the nationalist movement he could not fail to perceive the tremendous significance of the forces of change released by British rule.

The book may conveniently be divided into three parts. The first part belongs clearly within the domain of ethnology, here the author presents materials based on his own fieldwork and on fieldwork done by others mainly among tribal communities. The second part is predominantly indological, here we are presented with an account of the theory and practice of Hindu social life as these were set down in some of the principal classical texts. All through the first nine chapters of the book, which together constitute its first two parts, we see the same basic design in the

constitution of society. The last part, which deals with what may be described as social history, shows how this design came eventually to be disturbed.

Chapters 1 to 4 deal with the tribal people of India. Bose begins on his own ground so to say. He had travelled extensively through the tribal areas of Orissa and Chota Nagpur, and had collected from the field a wealth of information about the people of these areas. He had also been closely associated with Sarat Chandra Roy, the great authority on the Chota Nagpur tribes, and he drew much from the published writings of Roy. Bose uses his ethnographic data selectively, to show first the nature of tribal communities in India, and then, their relations with the wider society.

Bose perceived clearly that the tribal communities of India are not all of the same kind and that they do not all stand in the same relation to the wider society. He had been schooled in the kind of anthropology which gave a central place to evolutionary theory, and although in this work he is concerned primarily with the structure of Hindu society, he recognises that there are certain broad stages through which the simpler communities generally pass. He uses two related criteria for classifying the tribal communities of India: their level of technological development and the degree of their geographical and social isolation.

At the outset we are presented with an account of some of the remote hill tribes of Orissa — the Juangs, the Savaras and the Pauri Bhuiyas — whose mode of livelihood was based on shifting cultivation. Bose did his first anthropological field work among the Juangs and often used this tribe as an example of communities left relatively untouched by what he called the Brahminical civilization.

Even though the remote hill tribes were left mainly to themselves, they too have lived for centuries under the shadow of Hindu civilization. Bose uses his knowledge of the Vaishnava literature in Bengali and his familiarity with the distribution of temples to show that 'tribal' and 'non tribal' groups have lived in mutual awareness of each other for centuries. Indeed, the narrative opens with a description of the route along which

Chaitanya, the medieval Vaishnava saint, travelled on one of his pilgrimages. The tribal people through whose territories the pilgrims passed, Bose tells us, were probably the same as the Juangs, Savaras and Bhuiyis of today. The Juangs practise even now a rite through which they commemorate their traditional association with the Vaishnava saint.

We are given a brief account of the rituals of the Juangs and shown how 'Sanskritic' and 'non-Sanskritic' elements are combined in them. We are then shown how the Juangs, simple though their material requirements are, have to depend on others for some of the basic necessities of life. Increasingly they have to sell both the produce of the forest and of their own labour to the more advanced people of the plains as they find that their simple technology is unable to cope with the pressure of population on the land.

Bose raises the question whether the Juangs or the Savaras should or should not be regarded as Hindus. He says that popular opinion where they live would regard them as non-Aryan communities falling broadly within the Hindu fold. At the same time, one has to make a broad distinction between Hindu society proper with its elaborate caste based division of labour and marginally situated communities like the Juangs and Savaras. As is well known, the Indian languages do not make clear distinctions between 'tribe' and 'caste', the same term *Jati* being used in Bengali for both, and the term *upajati* being used to mean either subcaste or tribe.

From the Juangs and Savaras Bose moves on to the Mundas and Oraons, two of the principal tribes of Chota Nagpur. These tribes not only are larger in size but they also represent a higher level of technological development. Munda villages are divided between families of *khuntkattidars*, who claim superior rights to the land, and others related to them by marriage. They also include a few families of artisans such as blacksmiths, weavers and basket makers who are generally ranked below the *khuntkattidars* and their affines. The higher level of technology is associated with a more complex pattern of village organization among the Mundas.

Even before the advent of British rule the Mundas had territorial organizations extending beyond the village. Bose gives a

brief account of state formation among the Mundas and the impact on Munda social and political structures of their exposure to Muslim dominance. The Munda state finally lost its autonomy with the establishment of the East India Company's rule in the first part of the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century witnessed a number of social movements among Mundas, Oraons and related tribes. The *pax britannica* brought in Christian missionaries, and Hindu moneylenders and land grabbers from the plains. One important consequence of these threats to the old established ways of life was the emergence of revivalist movements of various kinds. Such movements reveal very clearly the dilemmas faced by these relatively isolated communities on being suddenly exposed to the full onslaught of a highly sophisticated cultural system. The Oraons sought escape from Hindu domination in a return to an idealised past which, however, was constructed substantially from elements taken out of Sanskritic Hinduism.

Bose shows that the influence of Aryan or Brahminical civilization has been greater in both extent and depth among the Mundas and Oraons than among the Juangs or Savaras. It is through influences of this kind that tribal communities become increasingly articulated with the wider society. This process, now widely described as 'Sanskritization', was discussed by Bose in a separate paper entitled "The Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption".¹ The distinctiveness of this method, according to Bose, is that it enables marginal communities to become a part of Hindu society without requiring them to abandon all their particular customs.

According to Bose the two modes of social organization, which may loosely be described as the 'Brahminical' and the 'tribal', have coexisted in India for a very long time. The first had a superior technological base and was much larger in scale and more complex in organization than the second. It was the higher technical efficiency rather than the superior political power of the Brahminical civilization that attracted the tribal communities to it. There was another factor behind the attraction, and this was the right given to all communities to practise their distinctive customs even when they were arranged in a hierarchy.

Bose's interest in the problem of technical efficiency led him to the study of particular crafts. As a 'field scientist', Bose believed that it was incumbent on him to study both material culture and social organization within a single framework. In this book we get a case study of one particular craft, oil-pressing. After making a rapid survey of the distribution of oil presses in India, Bose examines in detail the types of oil presses found in the erstwhile state of Seraikela which had a predominantly tribal population. Here we are introduced to communities which have acted as bridges between the two types of society, the 'Brahminical' and the 'tribal'. We also see here the remarkable capacity for precise observation that Bose had as a field scientist.

The co-existence and interpenetration of the two modes of social organization, 'Brahminical' and 'tribal', may be investigated in the field. It may also be studied through an examination of the classical literature of Hinduism. As an anthropologist Bose was interested not merely in revealing a certain pattern of culture but also in discovering the theory behind the pattern. He did not believe that the working of Hindu society in its details could be explained solely by this theory. But the theory was an indispensable aid in understanding how the society actually worked.

In the second part of the book Bose seeks evidence from the domain of indology to test his ideas about the design of Hindu society. Material from a variety of different sources—the epics, the *smritis*, Buddhist sources—is presented with this end in view. There is further an attempt to assess the impact of Muslim rule on Hindu society. The conclusion is that the design of Hindu society remained broadly unaltered right until the advent of British rule. The basic elements in this design were the elaborate division of functions, the assignment of these functions to particular families, lineages and subcastes, the right of such groups to practise their own customs, and their arrangement in a hierarchical order.

The chapter on the establishment of Aryan society in India opens with a discussion of the processes through which alien groups were incorporated into this society. Bose notes that the processes which can be reconstructed from a reading of the

sacred literature are substantially the same as those which are identified by the ethnologist from observations made in the field. He quotes a story from the *Ramayana* as an example of attempts made by individuals of the lower castes to adopt the practices of the twice born. From the *Mahabharata* we get ample evidence of the incorporation of various communities into the *varna* system.

Bose tries to identify the design of the *varna* system from a reading of the epics and the *smritis*. He finds in them the continual attempt to explain the ranks occupied by particular communities according to their origin and function. He says 'We can see further that there was a tendency in each lower order caste to imitate the rites and customs of the higher order castes' (Chapter 5, p. 87). And he shows how new subcastes emerged within the same caste through changes in social custom or occupational technique in more or less the same way in which he had seen it happening among the oilpressers of Seraikela.

We are given a brief idea of the king's duties as laid down in the various texts. The king's rule accommodated the diversity of customs which prevailed among the different communities which together constituted the larger society. Underlying these customs was the principle of a particular type of economic organization which according to Bose, gave Hindu society its distinctive character.

The village was in many ways the basic unit of economic organization in the traditional system and we are given an account of the division of labour through which the village was maintained. So long as this division of labour remained substantially the same the larger society continued to retain the same basic design. When this division of labour was finally disrupted, the basic design of Hindu society also changed.

The division of labour in the traditional Indian village was fairly elaborate. Besides agriculture there were many crafts and services. The villagers produced most of what they consumed and to this extent the village was a self sufficient unit. But the self sufficiency of the village was relative and not absolute. What was not produced within the village could be procured from weekly markets or fairs or pilgrim centres which were visited by many people from far and wide. Bose used his detailed and first hand knowledge of these institutions to bring out their significance in the traditional system.

Traditional India had evolved an elaborate social and economic organization. This Bose attributed in large measure to the high level attained by the traditional crafts in the country. There was also much advance in trade and commerce. One of the consequences of this was the development of urban life which was lived on a higher plane of sophistication than life in the village. Bose gives us some glimpses of city life, drawing mainly on the work of Vatsyayana, and paying special attention to associations of various kinds, including associations of craftsmen.

Muslim rule brought some changes into Indian society. Some new crafts were introduced, but these were confined mainly to towns and cities, and even when they penetrated into the rural areas they did not alter the basic pattern of economic organization in the village. Neither the new language of court, Persian, nor the religion of the new rulers, Islam, made much difference to the traditional division of labour based primarily on agriculture and village handicrafts, and organized through specialised groups ranked in a more or less hierarchical order. The Muslim rulers brought in a new religious ideology, but they did not bring in a new design for the economic organization of society.

It is not as if the principles on which Hindu society was organized were never put to question from within. Bose gives two examples of attempts to challenge the very basis of Hindu social organization, Buddhism in the ancient period, and the bhakti movement of Chaitanya in the medieval period. Both these movements rejected the ascription of status by birth and the hierarchical ranking of castes. But although they brought new life into religion, they failed to make a significant dent on the existing social order because, Bose argued, they did not generate any fundamental change in the organization of production.

Fundamental changes in the economic order were ushered in by the British. The new economic order they brought in succeeded at last in altering the design of a social system which had retained a remarkable degree of continuity over time. The third part of the book, which falls within the field of social history, discusses some of the ways in which the structure of Hindu society began to loosen and change under the impact of British rule.

The forces released by British rule are brought to our attention first through an examination of the family history of the

Bose saw very well that the erosion of the material and ideological basis of a long established society does not lead automatically to the emergence of a new social order. It has to be remembered that this book was written originally on the eve of independence when the thoughts of many in this country must have turned on the shape that Indian society would acquire in the future. Since he had participated directly in the nationalist movement, these thoughts must have occupied a central place in Bose's mind. He felt that by exploring the design of a social order that had survived for centuries and then collapsed under the onslaught of new economic forces, we might learn something about its strength as well as its weakness.

It hardly needs to be said that Bose was not a revivalist in any sense of the term. He was in fact hostile to all forms of obscurantist thought. He felt that an exploration of the past would be of use to the present and the future only if it were conducted in a truly scientific spirit. Bose saw very well that there was no question of shaping the new society in the design of the old, too many things had changed for that to be possible or even desirable. At the same time the models offered by the 'advanced' societies — both capitalist and socialist — were themselves not free from serious flaws. He felt that if one could discover some positive features in the social arrangements of the past, one ought to examine them carefully and perhaps put them to some use in designing the future society.

Anthropology, as Bose conceived it, was essentially a field science. Bose came to anthropology after some initial training in geology, and he taught for many years in a Department of Geography. All through his professional career he placed great emphasis on fieldwork as a basis for acquiring reliable knowledge about human society and culture.

In a paper published in 1949 he underlined the importance of fieldwork in disciplines like anthropology, archaeology, geography and geology, and pleaded for more adequate provisions for training students in the methods and techniques of fieldwork. He argued that the lecture room and the laboratory were not sufficient for training students in these disciplines, and that it was necessary

for them to be trained in the field for a period of two to three months. Bose felt that training in the field was the best way of bringing out the interdependence of the different field sciences. As a teacher, he was responsible for training successive batches of students of archaeology, anthropology and geography in the field.

There are different kinds of scientific disciplines which call for different types of training. There are disciplines like economics and political science in which training is imparted mainly in the classroom. Then there are disciplines like physics and chemistry where the laboratory in addition to the classroom is necessary for training students. Finally, there are disciplines like anthropology and geography where students have to be trained in the field in addition to the classroom and the laboratory. Bose felt that the essence of a scientific discipline lies in the training it gives in the handling of empirical material, the historian learns to handle empirical material in the archives, the physicist in the laboratory and the anthropologist in the field.

Bose himself was an indefatigable fieldworker. He started his fieldwork very early in his career and continued with it till almost the end of his life. His fieldwork included archaeological, anthropological as well as geographical investigations. Whatever the object of his current concerns — material culture, economic transactions, temple rituals — Bose felt that a trip to the field was bound to throw some light. Those who were close to him personally felt that he was never fully at ease when he was away from the field for any length of time.

Fieldwork had become with Bose almost a way of life. He travelled extensively through the length and breadth of India, and indeed regarded himself as something of a wanderer.³ One is reminded a little of his own restless spirit in reading his descriptions of the medieval wanderers whom he admired so greatly. Bose however was no mystic. He wandered among people not in search of spiritual communion but in order to understand their ways of life in the spirit of scientific enquiry.

Every field science develops in course of time its own traditions and standards of fieldwork. The work of Malinowski and his associates in the London School of Economics did much to establish standards of fieldwork in anthropology. British

anthropologists and those trained in Britain hold by and large that although many had conducted field investigations before his time, it was Malinowski who turned fieldwork into a proper instrument of scientific research. The tradition established by him requires the anthropologist to spend a period of about a year in the intensive study of all major aspects of a small community of people. In India a number of field studies of this nature have been published during the last two decades.

In discussing the nature of Bose's work we will have to make a distinction between *intensive* and *extensive* fieldwork. It would be misleading to assess Bose's fieldwork by the criteria established by Malinowski and his successors in Britain and the United States. Bose did not write any monograph on the basis of a long and intensive study of a particular community, even his study of the Juangs was interrupted after a short period when he came under police suspicion. At the same time the total period of time he spent in the field must be much greater than the time spent on fieldwork by most anthropologists whether in this country or elsewhere.

The kind of intensive fieldwork which Malinowski developed is ideally suited to the requirements of British or American anthropologists investigating alien cultures in far away places. If a British anthropologist is to make a field study of a tribe in Central Africa, it is best for him to plan an excursion in such a way that he can spend a long time in the field, it is unlikely that he will be able to make many such excursions in the course of his career. Thus, the pattern that has developed in Britain or the United States is for the anthropologist to make intensive field studies of one or, at most two or three communities, and to devote the rest of the time to writing up one's own field material or to writing general accounts on the basis of similar field material provided by others.

The pattern of work adopted by Bose was quite different from this. In his case there was no clear separation between the period spent in the field and the period spent away from it. One flowed easily into the other. For instance, it was quite common for him to go and spend a fortnight in the field in the middle of some writing in which he happened to be engaged. What made this kind of work habit possible was that

his field, unlike Malinowski's, was not in a remote or distant place but could be reached without much difficulty or initial preparation. As a fieldworker, Bose sought to take the fullest advantage of the fact that his field was easily accessible to him.

Bose held firmly to the belief that habits of work in a scientific profession ought to develop not in accordance with some pre-established dogma but in response to the available conditions of work. He regretted the fact that among so many of his younger colleagues trained in Britain or the United States field-work had become a venture to be undertaken once and for all. He felt that Indian anthropologists studying their own society and culture ought to integrate fieldwork much more fully into their habits of work. If it was not possible to spend an additional year in the field, he thought that no harm would be done by spending an additional week there.

It is thus that the whole of *The Structure of Hindu Society* is in a sense informed by Bose's fieldwork experience. Naturally, this experience is not equally rich in every sphere. There are some spheres in which his observations are general and limited, and others in which they are rich and detailed. But here, as in scientific work in general, Bose believed that the best should not be allowed to become the enemy of the good. He felt that it was much better to provide reliable first-hand evidence than to aim at precision for its own sake.

The book opens with a discussion of some of the most isolated tribes of Orissa. Bose's career as an anthropologist virtually began with his fieldwork among the Juangs, whom he revisited on a number of occasions. In writing about the Juangs, Kharias and Savaras he was basing himself on observations he had made, checked and rechecked. In the next two chapters, in which he discusses the tribes of Chota Nagpur, he draws heavily on the published work of S. C. Roy. Bose had a very close association with Roy, and had himself done extensive fieldwork in Chota Nagpur. Thus when he is making use of S. C. Roy's material he is describing customs and ways of life which he had observed at first hand. Even when he undertook historical reconstruction he preferred to take observations made in the field as his point of departure.

In Chapter 4 we get an idea of Bose's capacity for making detailed and exact observations in the field. The various types of oil presses found in a limited area are first described and then an account is given of the differentiation into subcastes according to differences in techniques of production. Bose attached great importance to technology or material culture and took pains to collect systematic data on it. As the discussion on oil presses shows, a careful analysis of the distribution of material traits contributes much to our understanding of the nature and varieties of culture.

When later in the book Bose talks about the trends of change during British rule, he is able to illustrate his arguments by taking up an area in West Bengal which had not only been exposed to the Company's rule from early times but in which he had himself done fieldwork. To be sure, his fieldwork in Jajigram village in Birbhum district was not as intensive as the fieldwork on which some of the more recent village studies by anthropologists are based. But this was one among the many areas in which Bose did his fieldwork, and it provided him with important facts for organizing his historical argument. Bose viewed fieldwork as not only a basis for gaining new insights but also a means for testing ideas.

Wherever he talks about village organization, whether in its economic or religious aspects, he is able to give substance to his arguments by referring to what he actually observed in the field. Bose maintained that markets, fairs and festivals played an important part in the economic and cultural life of villagers in traditional India. He had travelled extensively through the country, recording his observations in a systematic way. He had been to most of the famous pilgrimages, and when he visited a fair he made notes of what was bought and what was sold, and from where the buyers and the sellers came. This entire experience is woven into the narrative that is presented in the book.

Bose always maintained that anthropology was a science and that he sought to study society and culture in the manner of a scientist. This may sound a little surprising to the increasing

number of Indian sociologists who are preoccupied with what is commonly known as 'the methodology of scientific research' Bose did not preoccupy himself with refinements of technique or with abstract discussions on the relative merits of different types of methodology. He was of the view that the scientific method is to be tested in its practice and not by abstract discussion.

As I have mentioned, Bose was trained initially in geology, and this training influenced his work as an anthropologist. He saw the scientific method as being essentially a way of testing ideas by a systematic examination of facts. In this sense the scientific method could be used as much by the historian as by the anthropologist. Thus he believed that he could apply the same method whether he was studying the social history of the Sinhas of Raipur or the techniques of oilpressing among the Tcis of Seraikela. In each case the facts had to be carefully identified and classified, for they provided the final test of one's argument.

Thus for Bose the contrast was not between the sciences and the humanities, but between science and dogma, or between science and superstition. There was, according to him, nothing mysterious or obscure about the scientific method. In the case of much of traditional learning access was denied to all but a privileged few. The scientific method was, by contrast, accessible to all. Its basic principles could be easily taught and communicated. Any attempt to make the scientific method esoteric and arcane would in his view be a negation of the spirit of science.

Bose's use of what he believed to be the scientific method must be understood in the social and intellectual context in which he worked. As is well known, a high value has been placed on the wisdom of the books in traditional Indian culture. Bose adopted a sceptical attitude towards mere book learning. He felt dissatisfied unless an opinion or a point of view could be tested by direct observation in the field. This does not mean that he put no value on historical knowledge. But so long as a proposition concerning society or culture could be tested in the field he tried to apply the test. If it could not be so tested, he tried to reformulate it in such a way that an approximation to the truth could be reached.

Studying the economics of tribal communities, Bose realised that tribes practising shifting cultivation lose their economic viability when the pressure of population on the land exceeds a certain limit. They then enter into various types of economic arrangements with non tribal groups having a more advanced system of production. But Bose was not satisfied with this very general level of understanding. He made systematic investigations into the carrying capacity of land under various types of cultivation. This gave him a more reliable basis for talking about the integration of the tribal people with the wider economic and social systems in various parts of India.

Again, there was a general belief that the caste system was disintegrating under the impact of new economic forces. Bose agreed that an important basis of the traditional system was the monopoly given to castes over particular occupations. He collected data from the field to see the extent to which castes were giving up their traditional occupations and becoming occupationally differentiated. He also examined the data provided by the Census to show how the dissociation between caste and occupation had taken place at unequal rates at the different levels of the hierarchy.

Bose was well aware that the scientific tools with which he worked were rough hewn and home made, and he was perhaps a little proud of this. In all matters he sought to be self-reliant and he felt that if he spent all his energies in the endless refinement of his scientific tools, the wider purpose of his enquiry would be defeated. He must have felt, like Poincaré before him, that the social sciences have far too many methods and far too few results. Bose had a restless, activist mind, and he wanted results, no matter how approximate or tentative. The ground-work had to be established first, refinements would come later.

The first obligation of the scientist, in Bose's view, is to challenge received opinion. Here he had to fight on two fronts. On the one hand there were those nationalist historians who maintained that traditional Indian society was a model of perfection and that all the wisdom of the world was contained in the classical texts. Bose argued repeatedly that it was false to maintain that there was either socialism or democracy in any meaningful sense in the traditional order. Again, the classical texts had to be

examined not as the ultimate source of truth but as testaments of a particular society in a particular historical epoch

Those who had rejected the traditional wisdom often turned to western theory and opinion to lend authority to their views. Bose believed that an uncritical attachment to what passed for 'Western science' was no less irrational than an uncritical attachment to the traditional wisdom. The attitude of mind was the same in the two cases, and he felt that Indian social scientists often invoked the authority of Western scholars in the same spirit in which their forebears had invoked the *Shastras*. The scientist had to put everything to test, not merely the traditional wisdom of India, but also the contemporary wisdom of the West.

Bose felt that in the social sciences the younger generation of Indians were impressed more by the authority of Western scholars than by the spirit behind Western science. He himself greatly admired this spirit but sought to preserve his independence in relation to established schools of thought. He felt that there was too much preoccupation with concepts, definitions and terminology, a preoccupation which in his view was 'academic' in the worst sense of the term. He tried to steer clear of these discussions as far as possible in his own work and to present his facts and arguments as directly as he could.

There are obvious dangers in carrying this kind of self-reliance beyond certain limits. Science after all is not something that each individual can cultivate in his own backyard. Bose was by no means an isolationist in his scientific endeavour, and he believed in the fullest co-operation among scholars in all parts of the world. But he felt that much of the discussion on definitions, concepts and methodology in contemporary social science was sterile and could be put aside in the interest of more fruitful investigations into the real nature of culture and society. In his own view he was after all a field scientist rather than an armchair scholar.

There is another side to Bose's scientific work which explains why he chose a simple and direct mode of exposition. One great advantage enjoyed by science over traditional scholarship is that its truth can be made accessible to each and all. Bose believed strongly in the essential simplicity of scientific truth. He felt that important scientific discoveries can and should be widely communicated, and that excessive professionalization should not

be allowed to stand between the scientific worker and his audience. For this reason he not only wrote extensively in Bengali, but spent a great deal of his time explaining the findings of anthropological research to non professional audiences.

From what I have said above it might appear that Bose equated science with fact finding. This is far from the case. He knew only too well that facts do not speak for themselves, that they reveal their meaning only in the light of a theory. Facts are indispensable in testing a theory, they do not produce the theory itself.

We get a fairly clear idea from this book as well as some of Bose's other writings of his theoretical point of view about the nature of culture and society, and the sources of their stability and change. While it will be difficult and perhaps unnecessary to discuss this viewpoint at length here, some of its basic features need to be brought out. In what follows I shall consider mainly the way in which Bose viewed the relationship between what may be called the material and the ideal factors in social life.

Bose attached great significance to the economic factor as a source of both stability and change in social life. No society can survive without making some provision for the livelihood of its members, and in any sociological investigation due importance must be given to the mode of livelihood of the people being investigated. To understand the mode of livelihood of a people we must have first an exact idea of their technology or material culture. In his lectures Bose often pointed out that in India those who swear by the importance of the 'mode of production' in social life have often a very poor idea of the exact nature of technological processes.

We get ample evidence in this book not only of Bose's interest in economic factors but also of his knowledge of the details of technology. The description of the techniques of oilpressing is one example of this. Elsewhere in his writings we get details of various types of agricultural technology. Thus when Bose talks about the importance of material or economic factors, he does so on the basis of extensive observation and detailed knowledge.

Bose took a special interest in the economic organization of the tribal people. He believed that the best way of classifying

the numerous tribal groups in India is not by language, religion or race, but by mode of livelihood. This kind of classification enables one to see more clearly the relationship between the 'tribal' and the 'non tribal' dimensions of Hindu civilization. Bose believed that the 'tribal' and the 'non tribal' people have been in continual interaction, and the key to an understanding of this interaction lies in the different types of productive system under which they lived.

Bose felt that the tribal people were under constant pressure to abandon their isolation in favour of absorption into the wider society, and that this pressure was generated mainly by economic circumstances. All the evidence showed that the tribal economic systems were technologically backward and that they were sucked into the larger economy only when their own economic arrangements ceased to be viable under demographic and other pressures. But while the conditions of the absorption of tribal communities into Hindu civilisation are to be sought in the economic sphere, the manner of this absorption is dictated by other considerations. And it is this manner of absorption that is crucial to an understanding of Hindu civilization.

In other words, in order to understand Hindu society as a whole we must take into account not only its level of technology but also the design by which economic relations are organized. Now in all societies this design must be consistent with the level of technology, but to admit this is not to accept the role of economic factors as being in any ultimate sense basic or determining. Bose not only rejected all forms of technological or economic determinism but concerned himself specifically with the ideals of social, economic and political life by which each society is governed.

The Structure of Hindu Society is in this sense an exposition of the ideals on which Hindu society was constituted. Bose believed that these ideals could be studied objectively and scientifically. He was aware that ideals are never fully realised in practice. But a mechanical investigation into the behaviour of people alone would be an unending and sterile pursuit. The task of the anthropologist is to make the actions of men intelligible in the light of their ideals.

The ideals by which a society is governed, its productive organization and its technology do not remain unchanged for

ever. We get once again an insight into Bose's perspective on culture and society from the way in which he analyses change. Very briefly stated, his view is that the Muslim impact on India did not alter substantially the basic features of Hindu society whereas the British impact did. The reason for this, according to him, is that the British brought with them a new technology and a new system of production which the Muslims did not. Muslim society and culture could be accommodated within the broad scheme of the traditional order, but the new forces of production unleashed by the British shook this order to its very foundation.

But capitalism itself, in Bose's view, is to be understood not simply in terms of its technology or of how people use this technology, but also in terms of certain principles or ideals of economic and social organization. No doubt these ideals cannot survive in a vacuum, but without them technology itself would be an inert and lifeless thing. Bose rejected moncausal schemes in favour of one which gives a central place to the interplay of several mutually irreducible factors. In his own words:

There is no justification for a belief in pre-determination in the matter of historical evolution, and also no justification for a permanent emphasis upon any particular factor in the matter of determining the course of that evolution. Anthropology helps us in the study of the part played by various factors involved, and in observing if they have been constant or been different under different situations.⁴

The Structure of Hindu Society is an affirmation of Bose's appreciation of the variety and richness of collective life and his faith in human creativity.

Notes

1. *Man in India* Vol 27, 1947, reprinted in N K Bose *Culture and Society in India* Asia Publishing House 1957

2. 'Training in the Field Sciences', *Science and Culture*, March 1949, reprinted as Appendix II in N K Bose *Cultural Anthropology*, Asia Publishing House 1961

3 He wrote in Bengali a book called *Paribrajkaer Diary* (The Diary of a Wanderer) On bidding farewell to Mahatma Gandhi, he once said, 'Bapuji, I have always been a wanderer like this in life', see N. K. Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, Nishanta, 1953, p. 181

4 N. K. Bose, *Cultural Anthropology*, Asia Publishing House, 1961 p. viii

A Note on the Translation

WHEN I started translating this book in April 1972, its author was already stricken with cancer, and knew that he was a dying man. He saw the first four chapters of the translation, and appeared to be satisfied. In fact, after seeing the first chapter, he urged me to proceed with the work on my own, saying that he was confident that I would do it to his satisfaction. Although he saw only the first four chapters before he died in October 1972, I feel reasonably certain that the translation as a whole would have had his approval.

The translation has not been without its difficulties. I ought to say at once that I have no literary training in either Bengali or English, and, apart from two small pieces that I have translated from the French into English, this is my first major effort at translation. My long and fairly close association with the author, and the clarity of his basic ideas were the two main assets with which I started.

From the viewpoint of translation the material in the book is of two clearly different kinds. There is, first of all, Bose's text, what he himself wrote, this is uniformly clear and lucid, and, so far as I remember, it presented no problem at all. Then there are several long quotations from diverse sources, these were at times very difficult to translate. Even when the quotations were

from well known works like the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*, I was not always able to identify the particular version from which they were taken. I have for this reason not given proper bibliographical citations for the quotations, except in one or two cases, following strictly the original Bengali work in this matter.

I am not a Sanskritist, and I do not feel entirely at ease with the highly Sanskritised nineteenth century Bengali prose style which characterises some of the quotations in the book. I am certain that a purist will find fault with several of my renderings of the quotations. If I had spent more time, consulted more specialists, these portions would no doubt have been more accurately translated. But this is not a book written by a purist for other purists. Much of it was written in jail, and it was first published serially in a popular literary magazine. Given the audience to which the book is primarily addressed, I am satisfied that the translations of even the quotations are adequate, specialists will in any case be able to go back to the sources to satisfy themselves about their exact meanings.

Some of the quotations are indeed very long, taking up at times as much as half of a chapter. I thought at one stage that it might be best to prune a few of them and to paraphrase a few others in order to make them appear less obtrusive. This is probably what I would have done had the author been alive and able to indicate his approval. But he died before the work was half completed. At this stage I feel that it will be an unwarranted liberty to do something that can alter the balance the author might have wished to achieve in his presentation. I have therefore presented the whole work as it appeared in Bengali, hoping that the reader will not find the quotations too taxing.

I have not followed a scientific system of transliteration, being *unfamiliar with any that I can use with confidence*. I have tried to keep as close to the Bengali sounds as possible except where this might appear pedantic or be misleading. Thus, I have written Baidya and not Vaidya, but Calcutta and not Kalikata, and Orion, not Uraon. In some places in the translated text, the original Bengali term appears within square brackets immediately after the English word I have used in translation. At other places I have provided a footnote explaining the translation of a particular term.

I am most grateful to Tapan Raychaudhuri, now of St Anthony's College, Oxford, and formerly of the Delhi School of Economics, for his help in translating the verse passages relating to Chaitanya in the Prologue and in Chapter 9, these I would have been quite unable to deal with on my own.

Preface

A NUMBER of essays on the structure of Hindu society were published serially in the Bengali years 1354 and 1355 in the *Desh* magazine. These are being now published as a book through the good offices of Vishva-Bharati. Recently Principal Kshitimohan Sen and Professor Niharranjan Ray have published two valuable books dealing with Hindu society called Jatibhed and Bangali Hindu Barnabhed. A voluminous work by Niharranjan Ray has been in production for some time, and we can hope to see it published before long*. I have tried to supplement their work by publishing an account of Hindu society as seen through the eyes of an anthropologist. I shall consider my efforts amply rewarded if this work kindles in the reader some interest in anthropology and if it is of some help to him in understanding the structure of Hindu society.

37 Bosepara Lane, Calcutta-3
13 June 1949

NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE.

* Published later in 1949 in Bengali as Bangali Itihas Adi Parva [Translator].

Prologue

AFTER adopting *sannasa*, Lord Chaitanya felt that it would not be proper for him to live any longer in Nabadwip. When his mind was preoccupied with thoughts about where to go and to live he called his devotees together one day, and said

Even though on a sudden I have renounced the world,
Still shall I not become indifferent to you all
So long as I live shall I not forsake you,
And so long shall I not be able to forsake my mother
It is not the prescribed way for the sannyasi, after
renouncing the world

To live in his birthplace along with his kin
May no one speak ill of me on this account,
See to it that I can meet both my obligations

Then,

Hearing these sweet words from the lord,
Acharya and the others went to Sachî
They reported to her all that the lord had said,
Hearing this, Sachî, the universal mother, began to say
If he stays here I am happy,
But unhappy if people speak ill of him
Hence, I think, this will be the right thing to do
If he lives in Puri both purposes are served
Puri and Nabadwip are, as it were, two homes,
I shall hear of him from people travelling to and fro
all the time

You can all go there from time to time,
He too will come sometimes to bathe in the Ganga
I do not count my own joys or sorrows,

I am happy at whatever makes him happy
 Hearing thus, the devotees sang her praises,
 Saying Your words, mother, are like the dictates of
 the Vedas

The devotees then went to the lord and reported,
 The lord heard them and rejoiced

Thereafter the saint proceeded on his journey towards Puri
 The lord went along with four followers to the bank of
 the Ganga,

He started for Puri along the Chhattrabhog road

Along this same Chhattrabhog road, the devotees from Gaud or
 Bengal travelled year after year to Puri on the occasion of the car
 festival and in order to pay homage to the saint Lord Chaitanya
 himself also once set out for Mathura along this road and came
 as far as Gaud Expressing his attachment to Gaud, he said

In the land of Gaud I have two places of refuge
 My mother and the river Ganga, both very merciful

But circumstances acted against his visiting Braja on that occasion, and he had to return to Puri Sometime afterwards, in consultation with Ray Ramananda and Swaroop Damodar, he took, instead of the famous Chhattrabhog road, the route passing through the hills and forests of western Orissa on a journey to the pilgrim centre of Banaras An account of that occasion is given in the following words in the book, *Srisrichaitanyaacharitamrita*

Leaving the main road, the lord took the byroad,
 Keeping Cuttack to his right, he entered the forest
 He walked through the lonely forest taking Krishna's name,
 Elephants and tigers made way for the lord to pass
 Hordes of tigers, elephants, rhinoceroses and wild boars
 Through them the lord made his way in a state of trance
 Peacocks and other birds, on seeing the lord,
 Accompanied him saying Krishna, and dancing intoxicated
 The lord called loudly the name of Hari,
 The trees and the creepers took delight in hearing that sound
 All moving and stationary things in Jharkhand,
 He maddened with divine love by giving them the name of
 Krishna

Whichever village he passed through or sojourned at,
 Its inhabitants acquired the virtues of divine love

On the pretext of going to Mathura he came to Jharkhand,
 Its Bhil-like inhabitants were utterly godless
 He brought them all salvation by giving them the divine
 name and divine love,

Who can understand the mysteries of Chaitanya's divine play?
 Wherever he saw a forest he took it for Brindaban,
 Where he saw a hill he took it for Gobardhan
 Wherever he saw a river he took it to be Kalindi,
 And there he danced and sang, and fell weeping out of
 divine love

On the way Bhattacharya collected herbs, roots and fruits,
 Wherever he could get them
 When the lord stopped at any village,
 A few Brahmins would come and invite him
 Some brought cooked rice to Bhattacharya,
 Some brought milk and curds, and others ghee
 Where there were no Brahmins, some prominent Shudras
 Would come and invite Bhattacharya
 Bhattacharya cooked the forest produce,
 The lord took much delight in these forest meals,
 They kept provisions for a few days
 While passing through empty, uninhabited forests
 There Bhattacharya cooked the rice
 And made dishes out of forest fruits, roots and herbs
 The lord took great delight in these forest meals,
 And he was especially pleased when he could spend a day in
 solitude

Bhattacharya served him like a servant with love,
 The Brahmin carried his waterpot and outer garments
 Thrice they bathed in the water of hot springs,
 Twice a day they offered worship to the fire made with
 plentiful wood

Travelling continuously through such solitary places,
 The lord, happy and intoxicated with divine love, said
 Listen, Bhattacharya! I have been to many lands,
 Nothing compares with the joy of travelling through the
 forest

The merciful Krishna has been very kind to me,
 He has led me to the forest path and brought me much joy

Earlier I decided to go to Brindaban,
To see the devotees and mother Ganga.
I must get together with the devotees;
I must take them with me to Brindaban.
Thinking all this, I went to Gaud;
Seeing the mother Ganga and the devotees my mind became
joyful

Then, merrily, I went along with the devotees;
Millions of people came together with me.
The eternal Krishna himself instructed me;
By creating obstacles, he brought me by the forest route,
He is an ocean of mercy, kind to the poor and lowly;
There is no happiness without Krishna's mercy.
He embraced Bhattacharya, and said to him:
By your grace have I got so much joy.
He answered You, Krishna, are very kind;
I am a lowly creature, and you have favoured me.
I am worthless, and yet you brought me with yourself;
Out of compassion you begged through my hands.
You made a lowly raven the equal of Garuda;
Sovereign lord, you are the deity himself.

1

Some Forest Dwelling Communities¹

THE ROAD on the southern bank of the river Mahanadi in Orissa, along which Lord Chaitanya made his westward journey, though not well known, is an old one. The mountain ringed plains of Central India, where the Mahanadi has its origin, have been considerably influenced by Brahminical culture from at least the seventh century of the Christian era. All along the banks of the Mahanadi numerous temples were built from the seventh till the tenth or eleventh centuries, and even later. The temple of Savari Devi at Kharod and of Simhanath at Baramba, and the temples at Sripur, Malhar and Shurinarayan had been built long before the coming of Chaitanya, and were counted among the well known places of pilgrimage. Even though Brahmin settlements had been established by royal grants at the pilgrim centres here, at Simhanath and other places the right of worship is even now vested in the hands of non Aryan forest tribes.

These tribes inhabit not only the river banks but also the vast forest covered areas all around. Perhaps it was with reference to the Kandh, Juang, Savara, or some other of these tribes that Krishnadas Goswami used the phrase 'utterly godless' in his book, *Srisrichaitanyacharitamrita*. I would like to introduce the reader, to one of these tribes, the Juang.

The Juang Tribe

On the northern side of the river Mahanadi there were three small principalities called Dhenkanal, Pal Lahara and Keonjhar which have now been integrated into the Union of India.² The

Juangs are to be found in these three principalities. In Pal Lahara the Juangs even now practise an interesting rite. On a particular day in the year they put fruits into leaf cups and leave them in the forest. It is believed that Lord Chaitanya once sought gifts of fruit from them; the Juangs commemorate even today this event from the distant past.

The Juangs believe that in ancient times their tribe emerged from the earth on the hills of Gonasika where the river Baitarani has its source, not far from the village Ilonda in Keonjhar. In their language the word 'juang' means man. In other words, man emerged from the earth at the same place where the river Baitarani emerged. The Juangs refer to themselves also as the Patra-savaras.³ By this they mean that they are that branch of the Savara tribe whose members dress themselves in leaves.

In early 1928 I spent a few weeks in a village called Kantala, inhabited by Juangs and Savaras, in the state of Pal Lahara. A visit from the outside world is generally a cause of alarm among the Juangs. They thought at first that I had come with some sinister intention, perhaps to investigate for the Forest Department of the Government the collections they made surreptitiously of the forest produce. But when I offered worship to the presiding deity of the village and, after sacrificing two cocks, invited all the villagers to a full meal of rice, the Juangs gave up all their hesitation to accept me as a friend.

Worship

The man who was made responsible for the worship of the village deity was called Mani and he was the leader of Kantala. The village was inhabited by ten or twelve families in all. Each house in the village has a courtyard around which there are two or three rooms, topped with low, two-sloped roofs. The walls are made from the twigs and branches of the *sal* and other trees and then plastered with mud. The roof is thatched with the grass available in the forest. Even though the family hut has a two-sloped roof, near the entrance to the village there is a relatively larger hut with a four-sloped roof. This is known as the *majang* or *darbar*. At night the unmarried youth of the village sleep in the *majang* and in the daytime the men sit and chat there, and shape artifacts out of bamboo. In front is a plot of clear open ground. On this at night the girls dance in rows and the men

keep time on a kind of drum known as the *changu*. I have not seen any musical instruments other than the *changu* among the Juangs. On moonlit nights one can hear the music of the *changu* until daybreak, on other nights also one can hear it till quite late.

When guests come to visit the village they are lodged in the *majang*. The Juangs say that when a new village is being established the two main posts supporting the *majang* are the first to be erected. Their two principal deities, Buramhura and Buramhuri are also believed to reside there. A fire is always kept alight in the *majang*, anyone who wishes to smoke a cheroot may light it there. Before playing on the *changu*, they place its skin close to the fire in order to make it taut so that it gives the right sound. The Juangs believe that the sound of the *changu* is the voice of Buramhura, his powers reside in the fire which is why the instrument must be kept near it before being played to produce the proper notes.

Among the Juangs all married men are entitled to perform the worship of Buramhura, there is no separate category of priests in their society. An unmarried person is not entitled to worship Buramhura, he is perhaps not regarded as a full member of society.

Mani fasted on the day on which the worship had been organised on my behalf. After securing the materials for the ceremony, he bathed in the river, put on clean clothes and brought before the *majang* two small black cocks, about a seer of sun dried rice soaked in water, a cutlass, some incense and a fire. To begin with small cups were made with *sal* leaves which were then used as lamps after putting oil and a wick into each. Standing in front of the *majang* and facing eastward towards the sun Mani began

Satya jemato masike tale bahasindari upare dharmadebata
babure aing daegatainee samuisere Beabegi morane tharare
[Below us Basundhara above us Dharmadevata by the
truth of your being give to the *babu*⁴ the gift of our lan-
guage Bring him close to us speedily]

The language was simple and it was spoken simply this was no obscure incantation. The Juangs worship their deity and pray to him about their ordinary needs in the language of everyday speech.

After this Mani approached the ground which had been plastered with cowdung, drew three marks on it with powdered turmeric, and on these marks placed nine balls made of sun-dried rice. While placing these balls, he dedicated each to a particular deity, saying

Gala Buramburi paisena

Burambura paisenamade

Rusiam amade paisena

Tale bahasindari amade paisena

Upare dharmadebata amade paisena

Gala pitasani amade payena

Patrasha arani amade payena

Lakshmiddebata amade payena

Jetake burariki gala babuke tharare

Medenchenate afe payesenayete

[Well, Buramburi, you take Burambura, you take Rishipatni, you take Basundhara, below us, you take Dharmadevata, above us, you take Well, pitasani⁵, you take Patra Savari, you take Lakshmiddebata, you take (The remaining) *buras* (deities and spirits?) who are there, well, you also take this so that the *babu* may receive our language]

After the rice balls had been dedicated, the two black cocks were let loose. When they started pecking at the rice on their own, it was known that the deities had accepted the offering. Then Mani placed the cutlass on the ground with its blade facing him, and cut the throats of the two cocks in the manner used for slicing vegetables. Immediately afterwards he sprinkled some of the warm blood which came out on the rice balls and on the drums of the *majang*.

After the worship was over, the villagers got together and prepared for a feast with the rice which had been bought for a rupee.

Cultural Forms

The reader will have noticed that many features of the ceremony in the Juang village—the bath, the fast, the incense, the use of turmeric and sun dried rice, the invocation of names such as Lakshmiddebata and Rishipatni—give evidence of Brahminical culture. On the other hand, the absence of a separate category

of priests and of formalised prayers, the cock sacrifice, the worship of Buramhura, Buramhuri, etc., bear witness to an autonomous folk culture.

If we examine the modes of livelihood of the Juangs in Pal Lahara or Dhenkanal, we will find the same evidence of a fundamentally autonomous system on which Brahminical influences have acted. In these two areas careful investigations may still reveal the true modes of livelihood followed by the Juangs in the total absence of Hindu inhabitants and influences.

In the jungles of Pal Lahara there lives a tribe known as the Pauri Bhuiyan who are more prosperous and powerful than the Juangs. Like the Juangs, many Pauri Bhuiyans live in the deep forests and hills, or in the the narrower valleys. They are not accustomed either to the rearing of domesticated animals or to cultivation with the use of the plough. They clear the scrub from small patches of land in the forest and gather it around the trunks of the larger trees. After clearing a portion of the forest in this way, they set fire to it. The fire burns part of the ground, destroys the insect life and leaves a deposit of ash on the soil. The soil is then dug up with an iron hoe and seeds are sown in it at intervals. The mountain soil is fairly fertile and this area receives good rainfall, so that the land yields a reasonable harvest for two or three years even without tillage. But when the soil begins to lose its vigour, the Bhuiyans — or the Juangs — move to a different part of the forest to start their slash and burn operations again. Meanwhile, after remaining fallow for eight or ten years, the original plot regains its covering of scrub by that time the Bhuiyans might have come back to it to start the cycle again.

This kind of cultivation, based on the burning of the forest and the use of the hoe, has the limitation that it requires an extensive area to feed the population of a small Juang or Bhuiyan village. Cultivation with the plough could support at least ten times the population on the same area of land. Part of this population could engage in crafts such as carpentry and blacksmithery, and live easily on the surplus produced by the others, everyone would benefit by these bonds of cooperation. But the Pauri Bhuiyans, or the Juangs were in the past not familiar with these modes of production, and practised slash and burn agriculture. Unfortunately,

slash and-burn agriculture failed to meet their full requirement of food, everyday the womenfolk laboured to collect from the forest edible leaves, certain tubers and, according to the season, the fruits and flowers of trees such as the *kendu*, the *piyal* and the *mahua*. The men secured some food in the past by hunting game, but their freedom in this regard has now been restricted by various factors.

The forest dwelling communities do not have to depend for oil on the Kulus or Oilpressers. In the northern parts of Orissa the seeds of the *mahua*, *karanja*, castor and other plants are first ground in a husking lever and then steamed by being placed in a basket on top of a pot of boiling water. After this, the steamed and ground seeds are put into small baskets which are then placed between two wooden hoards—or between a hoard and a flat piece of stone—and oil is extracted by pressure. The forest dwelling communities make only a limited use of oil. The little that they need, the householders can produce for themselves without having to depend on the Kulus who are specialists in the extraction of oil.

All communities require iron. In Orissa there is a group of blacksmiths known as the Chapua Kamar. They are regarded as being lower in status than all other Kamars* because they employ bellows made of cowhide, and use liquor and sacrifice cocks in their ceremonies. In Palamau district in Bihar they are called Asuras and in Madhya Pradesh this community [*jati*] is known by the name of Agaria. The Chapua Kamar smelt iron from iron ore even today with the use of foot bellows and a three cubit high furnace. I had once bought for only three annas an axe made in Pal Lahara with iron smelted in this way. The iron produced by the Chapua Kamars meets the needs of the Juangs, Savaras, Bhuiyans and other tribes.

There are a few other things which men require for their daily use—salt, earthen pots and cloth for making garments. Let us leave aside the times when Juang men and women dressed in leaves. For many years they have been dependent for cloth on a caste [*jati*] known as Paa. The Pans live in Juang and Savara villages, buy yarn at the weekly markets and weave towels⁷ and garments from it. To buy their pots the Juangs have to go to the weekly markets set up in the nearby villages.

Salt is likewise an imported item but it is not sold by any particular tribe or caste. It is true that before British rule a caste known as the Nuniyas used to make salt on the Orissa sea coast which was transported in sacks by bullock or horse and sold in the forests by Kumbi and other trading communities. But salt is now much cheaper than in the past and readily available in the weekly markets.

The Juangs use earthenware utensils with great care. Wherever bamboo tubes can serve the purpose, they use them. They use bamboo rather than earthenware utensils even for gathering the sap of the date palm. For drinking this sap cups are made from the palm-leaf.

The Juangs do not have any winter garments and their clothing is in any case scanty. They are usually recognisable by appearance in the markets since their garments are more tattered and soiled than those of the others. Once I was returning with a friend in a motor car along a forest road in Singhbhum* district on a winter evening. We had not seen anything while going out by that road in the morning. But at dusk we saw about ten or fifteen small huts made from freshly cut branches and twigs. In this short span of time some people, speaking one of the Munda languages, had put a neat little settlement. Their tribe is known as Birhor. The word *bir* means forest and *hor* means man. Members of the Birhor tribe live in the jungles of Singhbhum, Hazaribagh and adjacent districts, and hunt rabbits, partridges and other small game. In addition, they make ropes and string bags from the fibre of forest creepers, and earn a living by selling them in the various weekly markets. When the proprietors of the forest try to extract a rent from them, they disappear and put up a new settlement some miles away. When we arrived in the winter evening at the Birhor settlement I have just referred to, we saw them lying around the fires they had made inside their leaf huts. When we asked them whether they suffered from the winter cold, an elderly Birhor replied with a smile 'Seyen! do ainga lija' [The fire is our garment].

Relations between the Juangs and Other Communities

If we analyse the cases described above, we will find that there are in the hill and forest regions of Orissa and Chotanagpur a number of communities in whose villages there are no Carpenters, Weavers or Physicians as in ours, somewhat like Robinsoa Crusoe,

they make their own huts, eat the roots and fruits of the forest, hunt, and, in illness, treat themselves with forest herbs, sometimes doing without even that. In their villages the division of labour is limited and there are hardly any craftsmen or specialists. The various requirements of the household are almost all met by local effort. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that they are completely isolated from all other communities. Because, even though the extent of mutual dependence is smaller than in the ordinary peasant village, here also they are linked with the Pans, the Chapua Kamars and other tribes and castes by relations of economic cooperation or by the bonds of livelihood. Further, they visit the weekly markets from time to time and establish relations as either buyers or sellers with members of other communities. This is how, although they have remained somewhat remote from Brahminical society, Lakshmi Devi and Rishipatni have found a place in their worship, and one sees among them the lighting of incense, the use of sun-dried rice, and the practice of the ritual bath and the fast. At the same time they have nothing to do with Brahmin priests.

Now, in this context the question arises as to whether groups such as the Juangs and Savaras should or should not be regarded as a part of Hindu society, or, in other words, of the social organization based on caste [*varna*].

Popular opinion in the state of Pal Lahara would say that even though the Juangs speak a non-Aryan language and eat the flesh of cows, pigs, snakes and other unclean animals, they ought to be counted among the Hindu communities. For after all, even among the Hindus, those who travel overseas eat unclean meat. Also, the language of all Hindus is not the same. Nor is it true that they all believe in the same deity. In other words, even among those who are properly counted as a part of Hindu society, local customs and folk customs vary so much that there is no reason not to regard the Juangs as a non-Aryan community belonging to the Hindu fold. Particularly since, among them, the worship of Lakshmi and other deities has slowly gained ground and since they have learnt to cleanse themselves with a bath and so on before worship, which all indicate that by slow degree their customs will become purified and their differences from the other castes will be reduced.

It has been said earlier that the Juangs come to the weekly market to purchase earthen pots, salt, cloth, etc. They in turn bring forest produce such as firewood or bamboo-work objects, such as baskets and winnowing fans for sale. Some of them might even engage themselves as labourers in the houses of well-to-do people. Here one notices an interesting set of arrangements in areas such as Pal Lahara and Dhenkanal. When members of non Aryan forest tribes abandon their ties with the forest and their Robinson Crusoe like self sufficiency, and enter into relations with other communities in either the market or the village, each such forest tribe seeks shelter in a particular trade or craft and, if possible, tries to earn a livelihood through it from generation to generation.

Like the Birhors in Chotanagpur, in Orissa the Makarkhia Kulha tribe makes ropes and string bags from forest creepers and sells them in the weekly markets. The Kharias of Mayurbhanj collect from the forest resin, wax, honey, etc. which they sell at a small price to traders in the village. In the vicinity of Dhenkanal town the Juangs sell firewood to villagers of other communities, and near Pal Lahara they make a little money by selling bamboo-work. In every case one can observe that each community has adopted a particular occupation. Following variations in local conditions, the same non Aryan community might be constrained to adopt different occupations in different regions in Orissa. But once a community establishes some kind of monopoly over a particular occupation others generally avoid taking it up. The different occupations are ranked as high and low, nobody likes to take up a 'low' occupation for fear of being regarded as 'low'.

My travels through Pal Lahara, Dhenkanal, Mayurbhanj and other places have led me to reflect on another matter. In the past the relations between the non Aryan tribes and the village communities forming a part of the Brahminical or Aryan civilization grew by slow degrees. Because changes among the non Aryan communities took place rather slowly, they could, according to local requirements, adopt a particular occupation and fit themselves into the division of labour of a larger economic community. And, following the norms of Aryan civilization, each community would have its monopoly recognized to practise its

particular occupation from generation to generation. But in the present age, thanks to the railway and the motorbus, the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the non-Aryan communities seem to be rapidly collapsing. There is no longer the old, slow pace of absorption, these communities have been, as it were, set adrift in the vast ocean of rapid economic transformation, and they are unable to decide in which direction to move and where to cast anchor. Thus, it is now ceasing to be possible for them to become absorbed into Brahminical society in the old way, to adopt a particular occupation and, on its basis, to develop firm ties of economic association with other communities. I would like to argue that when in the past the mingling of Aryan and non Aryan cultures proceeded at a slower pace, it was possible for these communities to acquire a monopoly over a particular occupation, it is my view that this was the design of Aryan civilization.

One learns from the *Manusamhita* and the other smritis that from very early times each community was allotted a particular occupation in Indian society. Each community was regarded as having a particular quality, and a close relationship was believed to exist between its hereditary quality and its traditional occupation. There were rules which permitted adoption of the occupation of others when, under unusual social conditions (i.e. in times of calamity), men found it impossible to live by their own occupation, but this was regarded as a temporary adjustment to conditions of emergency.

The responsibility to keep each community engaged in its own occupation rested with the state or kingly power. Even though various occupations were necessary for the well being of society, there were differences in the social esteem accorded to the different occupational groups. Occupations which were characterised by purity were ranked highest, those which called for valour came next, and the remaining occupations were assigned the lowest position.

The occupations followed by the majority of the non Aryan communities are ranked low because of the predominance of the properties of darkness [*tamoh guna*] in them. Therefore, even though they were bound by economic ties with the others the non-Aryan communities were treated with neglect and disrespect.

Then why did they abandon the self sufficiency of their forest life and seek to bind themselves by economic ties to the others? Why did they seek to imitate the worship of Lakshmi/Devata and the other Aryan deities?

Many believe that defeat in war at the hands of the Aryans led to the development of a slave mentality among the Kols, Juangs and other non Aryan tribes. This may be partly true. But we need to investigate more deeply why these 'slaves' lost all desire to be independent and how they developed this great urge to imitate others. If we find that, even when the right to rule the country was transferred from the Aryan to the followers of egalitarian religions like Islam and Christianity, the non-Aryan communities persisted in imitating Brahminical culture and fighting for a higher place in Brahminical society, we can no longer attribute everything to their slavish and imitative mentality.

To get a clearer understanding of the subject, we must move from this account of the gradual and rather limited spread of Brahminical influences on the forest tribes described in this chapter to a more detailed discussion of a few tribes which have been influenced to a larger extent. This will lead us to a deeper analysis of the underlying economic structure of Hindu society and of Aryan or Brahminical culture, or, in other words, of Hindu religion and civilization. Only thus perhaps will we be able to give reasonable answers to the questions raised above.

Let us now move from the banks of the river, where the waters barely touch the shoreline, slowly towards midstream.

Notes

1 I have here used 'community' to translate jati. The author uses jati in a broad sense to describe both tribes (such as Juangs) and castes (such as Kamars or Blacksmiths). This is consistent with Bengali usage which does not discriminate between 'tribe' and 'caste' in the manner of English speaking anthropologists. Where necessary I have used 'tribe' or 'caste' to specify the kind of community being referred to.

2 The original Bengali book was published just after integration of these states which are all in Orissa, into the Union of India.

3. Patra means leaf.
4. In this case, the anthropologist
5. Or petni, a general term for a female evil spirit.
6. In Bengal, the word *kamar* means either blacksmith or the caste of Blacksmiths.
7. In Bengal, the gamchha: a multi-purpose rectangular piece of cloth which serves as napkin, towel and upper garment.
8. Now in Bihar, but formerly a principality belonging to the same group of states as Dhenkanal, Pal Lahara, etc
9. This classification follows the threefold division of gunas (qualities) into sattva (purity), rajas (valour) and tamas (darkness).

An Account of the Mundas

We cannot say for certain whether there was ever a time when the Kol¹ or Munda tribe of Ranchi district lived entirely by hunting game and gathering the fruits of the forest, because our earliest records of the Mundas show them as settled in permanent villages and practising plough cultivation in the uplands. Even though they live by cultivation, one notices differences in certain spheres between the Mundas and other cultivators. They maintained a considerable measure of identity in regard to both land rights and social customs. Further, the Munda language is not a part of the Aryan family of languages, however, as a result of long association, many Hindi words have been incorporated into it in a slightly modified form.

After describing briefly their distinctive social features, we will discuss the social upheavals they underwent throughout the nineteenth century. Through all the turmoil which the Mundas have suffered, one can see certain directions of change in their culture in the recent period. Later, in discussing these, we might perhaps succeed in learning something about changes in human society and culture.

In this discussion we will depend much on the valuable works of the late Sarat Chandra Roy who spent a lifetime studying the various tribal communities of Chotanagpur with great sympathy and dedication.

Munda Culture

There was a time when the whole of Chotanagpur was covered

with deep forest. It is not unlikely that in the past the Kol or Munda tribe practised some form of slash and-burn agriculture. Even now one might find among them vague memories of the forest being gradually cleared by burning or jara.

The whole of Kol society is divided into a number of *killus* or clans [*gotra*]. After clearing the forest, a particular family would occupy a certain extent of land according to the needs of its members. There was a particular procedure for demarcating the boundaries of the land under occupation. Fire would be lit at four points in the forest, according to the need, and the boundaries formed by joining these four points delimited an area over which the *khuntkattidars* would be recognised as having every kind of right. All the cultivable and barren lands, and the forests within these boundaries were theirs, the *khuntkattidars* had rights against all others even over any minerals found to be lying below the surface of their land. Because they had such full and complete proprietary rights, the *khuntkattidars* did not pay any land revenue to anyone.

Everyone acknowledged the authority of the senior member of the lineage [*kul*] which had established the village. This person was given the title of *munda* or headman. Actually, this is how the Kol tribe came to be called the Mundas. Even though the village *munda* might be deferred to on all matters of social regulation, he did not acquire any special rights over the land, because ownership of the land was vested collectively in the entire community of *khuntkattidars*. The assembly of *khuntkattidars* allotted land for cultivation to each individual, the individual right of the cultivator was recognised over the harvest he produced on his land. The panchayat could, according to requirements, arrange for a redistribution of the land.

Within the four boundaries of their village, there is something which the Mundas even today preserve with care. However great their needs, the villagers will never set hands on a few old trees which constituted a part of the primeval forest. This collection of trees is known as the *sarna*. The village deity resides in the *sarna*, and prayers and sacrifices are offered to him here.

When somebody dies among the Mundas, it is customary to cremate the body, although in some cases burial may also be practised. Whether the body is burnt or buried, the bones are

later collected in an earthen jar and buried in the village cremation ground. In each cremation ground the remains of the members of only one *killi* are laid to rest. Where the last remains are buried, large and heavy stones are either put up vertically or laid out horizontally. Those who were held in esteem are given the largest stones. These stones are known as *sasan diri* or stones of the cremation ground. They are a characteristic feature of every old Munda village. When someone from the village dies in a distant land, his relatives collect his bones and do their best to have them laid to rest in the cremation ground of his own *killi*. In villages no longer inhabited by Mundas, the presence of these *sasan diris* acts as a memorial of their having lived there in the past.

Every Munda village has, in addition to the *sarna* and the *sasan diri*, another distinctive feature. On festivals, or, when they so desire, after a hard day's work, the men and women of the village sing and dance to the accompaniment of drums on a patch of cleared ground called the *akhro*. Just as each village is under a *munda*, so also each group of ten to fifteen villages is under the charge of a *manki*. In the past the *manki* had many powers and responsibilities in Munda society. But today, besides regulating minor social affairs, the *manki* has no responsibilities other than to preside over the *okhras* within his jurisdiction. The area under a *manki* is called a *potti*, *para* or *pir*. On festive occasions, when the *okhras* of the different *paras* assemble, the banner of each *para* is carried in a procession. If the insignia belonging to some are wrongly used by others, quarrels might break out between *paras*, leading sometimes to injuries and even murder.

Along with the *sarna*, *sasan diri* and *akhra*, one sees yet another characteristic institution in the Munda village. The bachelors of the village do not sleep in their homes at night. The room in which they all sleep together at night is called the *giti ora* or, dormitory. For the unmarried girls also a separate *giti-ora* may be set up in the house of some elderly widow where a room is available. The youth of the village not only sleep in the *giti-ora*, they also test each other's wits by exchanging conundrums (*nutum ka-ani*). Besides this, they learn about their ancient days by listening to stories of the past (*kajl ki anu*) from the village elders.

With their *sarna*, *sasan-durl*, *akhra* and *gitti-ora* on the one hand, and the rights over their land vested in the *khuntkattidar* panchayat on the other, the Mundas lived their lives with their ordinary share of joys and sorrows. So long as there was no shortage of virgin land, it was possible to cope with the surplus population by setting up a new *khuntkatti* village. In those days the Mundas depended for iron on the Kol speaking Asur or Agaria community, they extracted oil with a press made from two planks, for cloth they depended on the counterpart of the Oriya community of Pans, known locally as Panr or Penrai. The Munda householder did his own carpentry. For a few other things, he depended, like the Juang and the Bhuiyan, on the nearby permanent or weekly markets³.

But in course of time, because of the scarcity of land among various cultivating communities in Hazaribagh and Palamau districts, Ranchi district began to be subjected to the pressure of an immigrant population. Seeing the possibility of raising levels of living by adopting the kind of division of labour which prevailed in Brahminical society, the Mundas also began to imitate some of their crafts. They learnt to sow cotton and make yarn with a spinning wheel, they gave up their plank press and adopted the more elaborate oil press of the Kolus. But because the Kolus were rated low in Hindu society, for fear of losing caste the Mundas worked the new oil press not by bullocks but with the labour power of their own womenfolk.

In other words, the productive organization which was developed in Hindu society on the basis of a close association between different castes came to be accepted by the Mundas, and, just as Hindu society displays gradations among the different castes, so also distinctions between the high and the low came to be established in Munda society. The *khuntkattidars* refused to recognise as their equals those families which lived only by blacksmithery or weaving or tending cattle. The Munda cultivators began to regard themselves as equal to the other cultivating castes, and to regard the practitioners of many of the other crafts and occupations as being their inferiors.

Thus we may say that, when, along with the productive organization of Brahminical society, social gradations also became pervasive among the Kol speaking communities, they became

Borea five miles to the north of Ranchi was also built in the reign of Raghunath Shahi. Lachhminarayan Tewari began work on it in 1665 and completed it in 1682. The master builder [silpi] was named Aniruddha. It is not known to which province he belonged. Even though the Orissan influence is no longer visible in the structure of the temple, the distorted carvings of the Nahagunja and Gajasimha figures above the gate seem to indicate that, while the craftsman was not from Orissa, he must have had some slight familiarity with Orissan sculpture.

The reason for discussing these temples and their dates of construction is that, while before this period we do not get any indication of the splendour of the royal family of Chotanagpur, the end of the seventeenth century opens a new chapter in its history. We get some idea from this period onward of the courtiers brought to the royal assembly from Bihar and Samhalpur. In order to enhance the splendour of the Chotanagpur court, the king began to adorn it with Kshatriya and Brahmin attendants with titles such as *rautiya*, *bhaiya*, *bruttiya*, *pandeya*, *jamadar*, *wohdar*, etc., and a new economic arrangement was started, based on the *jagir*⁴ system which was introduced for the maintenance of these immigrant courtiers. The oldest document recovered from the royal treasury is dated 1676.

The men who were made *jagirdars* or *elakadars* over the various *khuntkatti* villages were completely unfamiliar with the local customs of Chotanagpur. In the past the king used to receive nominal gifts from the *khuntkattidars*, or, his subjects worked in the royal household for three or four days in the year free of charge (i.e., they gave labour service to the king). But the *jagirdars* came to feel that they had been given proprietary rights over these *khuntkatti* villages, and they began to extract rent in cash from their tenants. As a result, the rights of the Mundas over their land became restricted and their economic condition also began to deteriorate.

In these circumstances a man named Gasi Munda from the village of Hesagram near Khunti withdrew to the deep forests in the western part of Ranchi district and there once again set up a new village on the basis of the traditional *khuntkatti* principle. In other words, this person withdrew, and tried to survive on the basis of the old productive arrangement. But this

was not possible for everyone because forest or virgin land, on which new settlements could be made, was beginning to be in short supply, and, in the older villages the land rights of the Mundas came to be transformed and restricted as a consequence of the establishment of the *jagir* system.

The *jagirdars*, who were attracted to the Chotanagpur Palace from outside, did not come alone. Along with them Cowherds, Potters, Barbers and a few lower castes also entered Chotanagpur. From the time of the Moghul rulers some Muslim soldiers had settled permanently in Chotanagpur, and now some weavers of the Jolaha⁵ caste began to live there.

The Rule of the East India Company

In 1765 Shah Alam handed over the financial administration of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company. Since Chotanagpur was a part of Bihar in its financial administration, its relationship with the Company started from this time. In 1770 a certain Captain Camack made his appearance with a military contingent in the principality of Palamau in Chotanagpur. At this time the British were in conflict with the Maratha power. In order to check the advance of the Marathas, and also to open up a new route to the Deccan, the East India Company entered into a new pact with the then ruler of Chotanapur, Raja Darpanath Shahi. Until then the annual revenue from Chotanagpur was fixed at Rs 6,000. But as a token of his direct friendship with no less a power than the British Raja Darpanath Shahi, agreed to the Company's proposal to give, in addition to the revenue, a further sum of Rs 6,000 as *nazrana*⁶. The Council of the East India Company at Patna, being pleased with the conduct of Raja Darpanath, invested him with a costly robe as a sign of their regard for him. As a token of his gratitude, Raja Darpanath gave much help to the Company in its conquest of the kingdom of Ramgarh in 1772.

In course of the Company's rule the original annual claim from Chotanagpur was raised first to Rs 14,100 5 3 and then to Rs 15,041. It is true that Darpanath gained the status of a tributary prince, but for a ruler like him whose territory was a forested area where there was little improvement in agriculture, it became increasingly difficult to pay such a large revenue. The revenue from Chotanagpur was constantly in arrear. In the

meanwhile the subjects, being on their part unable to bear the burden of increased taxation, rose in revolt in Tamar pargana in 1789. Although the East India Company sent troops to quell the revolt, its fire continued to smoulder till 1795. In 1797 trouble broke out there again under the leadership of Bishnu Manki. In addition to Tamar, discontent began to grow for similar reasons in Rahe and Silli parganas in 1796-98.

After 1800 the Company imposed stamp and customs duties in Chotanagpur. These became fresh reasons for an increase in the people's tax burden and their discontent. In the meantime, on the ground that the Raja was not able to collect the revenue on time, the Company compelled him in 1806 to appoint a police force in order to maintain the peace. The people's burden of expenditure thus began to increase at a steady pace. In an earlier period, at the time of the institution of the *jagir* system, Gasi Munda had sought refuge by withdrawal, but now this kind of escape from the new system was no longer possible. At the same time, political consolidation did not show any signs of an increase in the people's income. As a result, time and again the people rose in revolt in various places. There were disturbances in 1812, then in 1819-20 a revolt was again declared under the leadership of Sale Rudu and Konta Munda. Unhappily, these two persons had to end their lives in the Company's jail.

Taking advantage of these happenings, the East India Company divested the Maharaja of Chotanagpur of his status of tributary ruler in 1817, and began to govern Chotanagpur through its own administrative staff. The *khuntkattidars*, who had so far been ruled by the Raja and then by the immigrant *jagirdars*, now came under the direct jurisdiction of a modern administrative system.

A New Menace

The hold of the past was not, however, completely loosened. The old arrangements dug their roots deeper into the soil till it cracked. In the meantime, the new administration, which was choking the old system—as a parasite chokes its host—began also to drain the soil of all its sap.

Just as the institution of the *jagirdari* system was attended by a certain menace, in similar fashion a new class of exploiters called *thikadars*⁷ now made their appearance in the countryside.

When Raja Gobindanath Shahdeo died in 1822, his nineteen year old minor son, Jagarnath Shahdeo ascended the throne. Some Sikh and Hindu traders and a large number of Muslim traders swarmed around his court like flies. They came with merchandise from outside such as horses, shawls and costly silken cloth to sell to the king. The kings were attracted by splendour and sensual pleasures as became evident from the time of Durjanshal itself. But because the present king did not have the capacity to pay in cash, he transferred landed properties one after the other to the *thikadars*. In place of the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas now became the owners of landed property.⁸

The *thikadars* did not remain satisfied merely with collecting rent from the Munda tenants. There was no end to their *abwabs* and *selamis*. In spite of their exploitativeness, because the earlier *jagirdars* had at least lived permanently among their tenants, a certain smooth and easy relationship had developed in their personal lives, no such relationship could develop with the *thikadars* whose principal interest was economic gain.

Earlier the Munda tenants used to give certain gifts every year to the village elders, or gave labour service for a few days to the leaders of the community. The *thikadars* now began to regard these gifts and services as their rightful due. In other words, what used to be the return for social leadership became transformed under the new tenurial arrangement into rent, or the return for the use of land. This is why the Mundas shudder, with rage and bitterness, at the very name of 'thikadar'. If we read one of the proposals put together later by the Bengal Government, we will learn that the Mundas used to say among themselves, 'The Pathans destroyed our honour, the Sikhs abducted our sisters. We are people of a single race (*jati*), so we must unite as one, and kill and plunder.'

As a consequence of this kind of oppression and exploitation, the flames of revolt were lit anew in Chotanagpur in 1832.

The Coming of Christian Missionaries and Later Developments

Meanwhile a major change came to be introduced into the lives of the inhabitants of Chotanagpur. When the Munda cultivator's rights over the land came to be restricted on every side and when the British Government, unaware of the real source

of suffering, continued to help the landed stratum, Protestant and later Catholic missionaries from Germany and England appeared on the scene as unfailing supporters of the Munda community. They did not rest content with presenting to the Government the just demands of the Mundas or with providing food to the hungry among them in their days of distress. They learnt the Munda, Oraon and other languages, and worked tirelessly to free these communities from superstition and to teach them the way to a better life. The Christian missionaries were perhaps the first people from whom the forest tribes of Chotanagpur could claim their rightful status as human beings.

After the revolt of 1832 described above had been quelled, fresh disturbances started in 1858 in the parganas of Sonepur and Basia. At the time of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, although there was a revolt in the cantonment in Chotanagpur, the ordinary people did not take part in it. After the Sepoy War, the Government in 1858 sought to collect information on land ownership in Chotanagpur. In order to protect those ancient rights over the land which still persisted among the Mundas, an act known as the Bhunhari Act was passed in 1869.

But the Mundas did not in fact receive the kinds of benefits that had been contemplated in the Bhunhari Act. The primary reason for this was that the Mundas had lost most of their ancient rights over the land before the Act came into being. Secondly, in the Act itself, the unlimited rights they had so far enjoyed, of collecting wood from the forest for making fire or building houses, were not protected. To add to this, the collective rights of the community over the plot of land known as the *sarna* fell outside the purview of the Act. Thirdly, for want of education, they were defrauded in a variety of ways. The policies which the British Government had followed all this time in Chotanagpur gave the Mundas no reason to view the Government as a friend or ally. It took them time to realise that the Bhunhari Act was framed for their well being. Meanwhile, the local *jagirdars* and *thikadars* began to explain to them that the Government was planning to raise the land revenue through the new Act, as a consequence, the Mundas, out of fear and suspicion, failed in many cases to get the few rights they still had on the land registered at the Government office. In spite of the

the leadership of Birsa Munda, tried unsuccessfully to rise in arms and drive all outsiders away from Chotanagpur. Like Rudu and Konta Munda, Birsa Munda also died in jail, and many of his followers were either hanged or suffered long imprisonment.

After subduing the Birsa Movement, the British Government made arrangements to protect the Munda peasantry from the oppression of the *jagirdar* and *thikadar* class through a series of new laws. At this time a certain missionary by the name of Father Hoffmann gave much help by way of explaining to the Government, on behalf of the Mundas, the true nature of Munda land rights and the laws relating to these. When the Government, in consequence, passed Act 3 and Act 5 in 1909, the Mundas were really able to heave a sigh of relief.

Trends of Culture Change

We have already indicated that, although in the matter of land rights or social arrangements the Mundas differed considerably from the Brahminical castes, in all matters relating to production, the influence of the rest of Hindu society, though often unnoticed, was entering deep into every reach of Munda society. As the *zamindars* and *thikadars* were gradually spreading their influence in Chotanagpur, their presence was followed by the arrival of many other castes, such as Cultivators, Carpenters, Blacksmiths, Barbers, Oilpressers, Bellmetal Workers, and so on. Although the Mundas might resent the *zamindars*, there was no resentment against these new crafts and occupations. Nor does one expect resentment against more advanced productive arrangements as such. Hence the Mundas and Oraons accepted these arrangements for all practical purposes. They began to regard themselves as a cultivating caste and, for fear of losing caste, they kept their hands off the trades of Oilpresser, Carpenter, Blacksmith, etc. In other words, in surrendering themselves to the productive arrangements of Brahminical society, they tacitly accepted the caste system and the *varna* creed.

In spite of their deep debt to the Christian missionaries, the teaching and sympathy or love of these missionaries could not save the Munda tribe from the consummation described above. At first, when the Christian missionaries joined the fight on behalf of the Mundas, there was tremendous enthusiasm on every side for conversion to Christianity. The late S. C. Roy has

written that, among the inhabitants of Chotanagpur, those who, like the Birhor, Korwa and Asora, did not have any land or any financial dealings with traders, always remained at a distance from the influence of Christian missionaries, but, on the other hand, those who were tillers of the land were, in their days of economic hardship influenced most by the spread of Christianity

We must note something in this context. Even though the Christian missionaries might sincerely support the cause of the oppressed tenantry, the missionaries never encouraged their revolt against the Government. They always tried to seek remedies for oppression through constitutional means. While on the one hand they made the Government aware of the ancient rights of the Mundas, on the other, they also tried in every way to improve the economic conditions of the people by spreading education among them, teaching them various crafts and establishing co-operative societies. There is no doubt that had they imbibed these skills and ideals, the inhabitants of Chotanagpur would have profited more than by imitating the productive arrangements of Brahminical society. Nevertheless, if we examine the matter closely, we will find that in Chotanagpur as a whole the influence of Christianity was less than in the past. The reasons for this lie embedded in the heart of Munda and Oraon society. Instead of taking the path of Christianity, they began to make greater efforts to have themselves incorporated into the social arrangements based on the *varnashrama* system and on caste distinctions, or, to raise themselves to a higher station or level in that system. What are the reasons for their strange behaviour?

I personally believe that there are two reasons for this. Firstly, all around the Mundas and Oraons very many people were leading a better life than they by following the rules of a society based on caste and the division of labour. This must have been a tremendous attraction. Secondly, a new obstacle appeared in their way in following the footsteps of the Christian missionaries. When the Mundas following their natural human instincts rose time and again in revolt against the increasing exploitation the missionaries, in spite of their efforts failed to stem the tide of revolt and to lead them along constitutional paths. The

missionaries were never able to give their support to rebellion. I think that, in this climate of excitement, the rupture which was once caused in their bonds of amity and union could never be repaired and made whole again. Birsa Munda was himself a pupil in the German missionary school at Chaihasa. At the time of the revolt of 1899 he instituted a new religion. This religion combined Christian monotheism with wearing the sacred thread and the practice of ritual purity. This intriguing social and economic revolt failed to secure the support of the Christian missionaries. As a result, when the revolt was on, the followers of Birsa did not hesitate to attack Christian churches and even the missionaries themselves at various places in Ranchi district. In 1879-81, when several thousand Christian Mundas and Oraons participated in the Sardar Rebellion, they also did not secure the support of the missionaries.

I think that because of these two reasons, the inhabitants of Chotanagpur could overcome their hatred of the Hindu and Muslim landlords and traders in spite of being exploited at their hands, and become more and more attracted towards the productive arrangements prevalent in the country as a whole. In the end, it was the ancient caste based productive organization which appeared much more agreeable to them than the more advanced productive organization proposed by the Christian missionaries.

Perhaps a third factor was also responsible. Among the Mundas and Oraons, those who became Christians broke many of their ties with the other members of their society. In dress, deportment and the ordinary conduct of life, so many differences appeared that the influence of the more progressive sections did not reach down to the rest of the people.

Perhaps in comparison to the whole of Munda or Oraon society, the number of those who were influenced by the missionaries was relatively small, and this might be a reason why the more advanced productive organization, which could bypass the caste system did not find favour with the others. The old organization had much force and vitality even then. Due to a combination of these various factors, the ideals and influence of Brahminical society grew apace among the different communities of Chotanagpur. What kinds of changes have taken place as a consequence of this in the culture of the non-Christian

communities, we will discuss in the following pages by taking up the analysis of a few social movements.

Notes

1. Bengali readers are perhaps more familiar with the term "Kol" which is used synonymously with "Munda".
2. This is an important term whose meaning will becomes clearer as we proceed.
- 3 I have translated *hat* as weekly market and *bazar* as permanent market.
- 4 A fief or a prebend, the term jagirdar thus means a fief-holder or prebendiary.
- 5 A caste of Muslim weavers.
6. A customary form of gift paid in addition to the usual revenue.
7. Literally, a contractor.
8. The terms Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya are being used broadly and metaphorically.
9. These are cesses and fees which are generally extortionate and often illegal
10. A *sardar* is a chief, a headman or a leader, in this case the leaders of the tribal people.

3

*The Spread of
Brahminical Influence
in Chotanagpur*

The Mundas of Panchpargana¹

THOSE who have studied the history of the Mundas closely tell us that the Munda tribe entered Ranchi district from the north west. They were followed along the same route by the Dravidian speaking Oraon tribe. As a result, the Mundas were gradually pushed into the eastern parts of the district. Finally, after crossing the river Subarnarekha, they sought refuge in Jhalda, Begunkodar, Patkum and other parganas in the western part of Manbhum district. But they were not able to stay there very long. When the Kurmi caste of Manbhum began to press into the western parts of the district in search of good land for cultivation, the Mundas crossed the Subarnarekha again and finally took shelter in five parganas of Ranchi district, namely, Silli, Bundu, Baranda, Rahe and Tamar.

We have already said that the Mundas have for a long time practised cultivation and having accepted the caste based division of labour, have lived in mutual relationship with Weavers, Blacksmiths and other communities. But the influence of Brahminical culture on them has not been equally great in every part of Ranchi district. In some areas it has been large and in others small. The late Sarat Chandra Roy has written that everywhere the application of turmeric, the mutual exchange of vermillion by bride and groom at the time of marriage, and the prescription for fasting and bathing during religious ceremonies give evidence

of Brahminical influence among the Mundas. Moreover, in Silli and Tamar, after completion of the marriage rites, the man and woman together shout aloud, "Haribnl ! Haribol !"¹²

Sarat Chandra Roy has given some beautiful examples of the way in which the influence of the neighbouring Vaishnavas has made its way into songs composed in pure Mundari. Given below is one such song with a translation

Jamuna gara japa, buru gutil kadam suba
 Tiri tiri rutu saritana
 Mand sakam choro roro
 Soben banko niratana

Karkom do duar-re dubkana landatanae

[By the banks of the Jamuna, on sandhills at the foot of the *kadani* tree, the bamboo flute plays tiri tiri¹³. The *banshpatti* fish the *chang*, the *magur*¹⁴ and all kinds of fish run about. The crab sits by his door, smiling.]

Among the Mundas resident in the five parganas some have adopted the Vaishnava faith. Further, those Mundas whose customs have been somewhat modified by Brahminical influences describe themselves as Bbewihari Chhatis. Although there are some who have not given up the name Munda even now, they do not like to group themselves with other Mundas resident in the other parganas of Ranchi district, because their customs have not yet become sufficiently purified. Because those Mundas eat beef like the Oraons the relatively 'pure' Mundas of the Panch parganas refer to them as 'Mundari' or 'Uram Munda'.

While accepting Brahminical customs and modes of behaviour in other spheres, the Mundas of the five parganas have not given up the worship of their ancient village deities. In place of the other deities in their indigenous pantheon they worship Mahadev. Just as the Juangs sacrifice cocks to Lakshmi Devi, they also offer animal sacrifices to Mahadev, although according to Brahminical rules no such practice is prevalent anywhere. Some changes have also come about in the *killi* or clans of the Panchpargana Mundas. The Sindi *killi* (sindi=man) has been transformed into the Sandil clan, and the Mundas now believe that the sage Sandilya¹⁵ was the founder of this clan. Most of the Mundas of Sonahatu thana are of the Sandil clan. They marry among themselves but such intra clan marriage is nowhere to be found either among the

Brahmins or among the pure Mundas S C Roy believed that Mundas belonging to various *killis* claimed membership of the Sandil *gotra* in their effort to pass for Hindus, and, therefore, in later times this kind of intra clan marriage became possible.

The Manda Festival

In Ranchi district a festival known as the Manda festival is celebrated in the summer. In addition to Mundas and Oraons members of other communities also participate in it. In a village called Tangratoli I have seen Blacksmiths, Cowherds and Mridhas (a variety of Doms) participate in the Manda festival. Those who participate in this festival practise ritual purity in their food and other habits for a number of days. On this occasion a Vaishnava Gosain acts as their priest, and various rites are practised at the shrine of Mahadev.

In villages like Morhabadi and Tangratoli which are adjacent to Ranchi, and in other villages which are further away, the Manda festival is celebrated with much pomp. In reality it is but another form of the Charak festival practised in Bengal. But while the Charak festival takes place in the month of Chaitra, there is no rigidly fixed time for the Manda festival. The Manda festival is celebrated on different days in the different villages generally in the month of Baisakh or of Jaishtha, according to the convenience of the Vaishnav Gosain.*

Those among the Oraons, Mundas or Ahirs who act as *bhoktas*, or seek to play the role of ascetics in the festival,⁷ are sometimes possessed by Mahadev. When he is thus possessed, the man thinks that he is being divinely inspired to be a *bhokta*. However, there is nothing to prevent one from being a *bhokta* even without this kind of divine inspiration. In the village of Morhabadi I have seen the *bhoktas* being invested with sacred threads by a certain Ramayet Gosain, and then for three days restraining from meat, fish, salt, turmeric and spices, and taking only milk, rice, fruits and sweetmeats.

Everyday the *bhoktas* put on variegated garments and go from door to door to beg while playing on their musical instruments. On these occasions they take a wooden plank with nails stuck to it from the shrine of Mahadev, and carry it reverentially on their heads. They regard this wooden plank as the image of the goddess Parvati. On the second day of the ceremony the *bhoktas*

have to assemble at the shrine of Mahadev and practise certain rites. Two of these are particularly noteworthy. One is called *Landhanya* and the other, *phulkudna*. At the time of *Landhanya* the *bhoktas* squat in a row and the Gosain walks for a considerable distance on their shoulders and enters the shrine of Mahadev. If there are only a few *bhoktas*, then as soon as the Gosain has stepped over the shoulders of one, he rushes across to the front of the row and squats there. By this act the *bhoktas* display their total submission to the Gosain.

The second rite is called *phulkudna*³ which means to walk or leap across the flowers. This does not start before nine or ten in the evening. Near the shrine of Mahadev a pyre is dug which is about eight or ten cubits long two cubits wide and a little over half a cubit deep. Charcoal is piled on top of this and a blaze is made by fanning the flames with a winnowing fan. When the fire starts blazing, the priest first sprinkles sanctified water on it. Then the *bhoktas*, who have in the meantime bathed in the tank, come in their wet clothes and walk slowly and in line over the fire. Not once, but three times in succession they walk over the entire length of the fire. I had once seen a very young *bhokta*, who for fear was trying to quicken his pace being restrained and made to walk slowly by two or three older men. I have seen by the watch that each time they take two or three seconds or that in all they walk over the live coals for about eight or nine seconds but that in spite of this not one of them gets blisters on his feet nor to speak of having the feet burnt. Each *bhokta* has his mother, sister or some other woman to attend on him. These women also observe all the ritual restrictions along with the *bhoktas* for the necessary period. They are called *sokhtain*. After the *bhoktas* have finished their turn at *phulkudna* the *sokhtains* also walk along the fire. They also do not show any scars on their feet or any sign of agitation during their firewalk. In answer to my question on the day after the *phulkudna*, one of the *sokhtains* said to me in all sincerity that the goddess Parvati covers the fire with the end of her garment, and that is why the heat does not touch anyone.

As soon as the *bhoktas* and the *sokhtains* had finished their walk, one of my companions rushed to the fire and tried to walk over it, but his feet got covered with blisters. Another person

had fasted along with the *bhaktas* and like them taken a bath just before the *phulkudna*. Because he was a little afraid, he went over the fire very briskly, but he did not get any blisters on his feet. He felt that because the *bhaktas* were used to walking unshod, the soles of their feet would ordinarily be rough and calloused. On top of this, when they walk in their wet clothes to the shrine of Mahadev immediately after a bath, the soles of their feet get coated with earth, and this covering perhaps makes it possible for them to walk on the fire. This may be partly true. But one sees boys of even eight or ten taking part in the *phulkudna*. They have small feet with relatively tender soles, but nothing happens to them.

Again I have heard in a village far from Ranchi town, in Khunti thana, that the *bhaktas* do not stop at merely walking over the fire. So long as the fire does not go out, they dance on it and scatter the live coals all around with their feet. Those who have seen this maintain that no damage is done to the feet of the *bhaktas*.

At the end of the *phulkudna*, groups of Mundas, who assemble from the different *paras*¹⁰, engage in competitive dancing throughout the night. The local *manki* is present at the assembly. Some of the dancers even wear masks representing Rama, Ravana, Bhima, Arjuna and others, but there is nothing like the narrative opera that one finds in the traditional *jatra*¹¹. The next day the *bhaktas* swing around the Charak pole as is the custom in Bengal. On this occasion small fairs are set up, and when the fair is dispersed, the Manda festival also comes to an end.

Social Movements among the Oraons

Now let us discuss the social movements which have emerged among the Oraons as a result of the spread of Brahminical influences among them. There are several devotionist sects among the Oraons, such as Bhupnphut Bhagats, Nemha Bhagats, Bishnu or Bachchidan Bhagats and Kabirpanthis. Just as among the Mundas, Brahminical influence is greater in the vicinity of the Manbhum region, whatever one sees of it having been for long fused with Munda culture, so also in the case of the Oraons Hindu influences have come from the directions of Gaya and Sahabad districts in Bihar, Raipur and Bilaspur districts in Madhya Pradesh, and Sambalpur and Gangpur districts in Orissa.

The devotionist sects mentioned above, such as Bhuinphut, Nemha, etc are not very old. As far as one can tell, they emerged for the first time about seven or eight generations ago. After adopting the path of *bhakti*, the Oraons practised to the extent possible a ritually pure way of life and begin to discard as far as they could those elements in their ancient folk customs which violated the principle of *bhakti*. At the same time, they did not break their marriage ties with those families which retained all the traditional ways, but frequently married with them.

Bhuinphut Bhagat Whenever an Oraon finds a particular traditional practice to be detestable, he begins to feel dissatisfied and tries to find some way of becoming ritually pure. Now, at this time he sees in a dream that Mahadev has appeared in his house. Later on he actually sees that in some room or courtyard of his house a piece of stone has pierced its way through the earth¹². Following this, such a person starts to worship the Bhuinphut Mahadev and to keep the stone segregated from the rest of the house by having it enclosed or covered by an awning. After this the Oraon in question tries to practise ritual purity. He ceases to eat the flesh of cows, pigs or she-goats, and eats only the flesh of the he goat, he gives up liquor, he does not sit in the same row and dine with members of his tribe, but, when invited on ceremonial occasions returns home with uncooked food. The Bhuinphut Bhagats offer animal sacrifices to Mahadev, although no such practice prevails among the Hindus. Furthermore, they continue to offer worship to the village deities, and oblations to their dead ancestors in the traditional manner. But they do not offer sacrifices, and, at community festivals, they confine themselves to giving their allotted subscription.

Nemha Bhagat The Nemha devotional sect emerged in Ranchi district about eight or nine generations ago. The Nemha Bhagats follow strict regulations in regard to food and other matters from which they derive their name¹³.

Bhushnu Bhagat Some Oraons of the Bhagat family have started taking initiation vows from poor Brahmins or Gosains or Bairagis who move in search of clients. These professional gurus or religious preceptors, who come from Gaya or Sahabad district, utter the name of Vishnu or Krishna in the ears of their disciples. The disciple presents a calf to his preceptor in the customary

way in atonement of the sins of his past. For this reason, the *bhaktas* initiated in this way are called Kan-phut Bhagat, or Bach-chhidan Bhagat or simply Bishnu Bhagat¹⁴. They are more strict on ritual purity than the Bhuinphut Bhagats and do not eat any kind of meat.

Kabirpanthi Bhagat During the first part of the nineteenth century, the influence of the devotees of Kabir entered Ranchi from Raipur and Bilaspur districts. Just as Sambalpur district has been influenced by the Kabirpanthis, so also in Gangpur and in the Simdega region in the southwest of Ranchi district, this movement has left behind a certain influence. The Kabirpanthis are extremely strict about ritual purity. That is why, even when they give a daughter in marriage to a family which follows the traditional Oraon ways, they do not afterwards allow her to cook or serve rice and pulses to her parents in her natal home. What is more, she is not even allowed to sit in the same row at mealtime.

It is true that Christianity has gained much ground among the Oraons, but, as in the case of the Mundas, the non Christian Oraons have not changed very much through the influence of the Christians. S. C. Roy has actually written that whenever the country is passing through a severe economic crisis, there is a great wave of conversion to Christianity. But when the times improve, a few of them return again to their traditional ways. But the influence of Hinduism operates in a different way. There is hardly any effort worth the name made by the Hindus to propagate their religion, at the same time, the Oraons adopt Hindu ways and customs of their own accord, some adopting more and others less. How far this can go we can see from an analysis of the emergence and spread of the Tana Bhagat or Kurukhi-Dharma movement.

The Tana Bhagat Movement

There lived a man called Jatra Oraon in village Bepirinwatali in the Bishunpur thana of Gumla subdivision. In 1914 his age would have been 25 years. This person announced in the month of April in that year that Dharmesh, the high god of the Oraons, had revealed to him that they would have to give up the worship of ghosts and spirits and the practice of exorcism, and that they would have to refrain from animal sacrifice, meat eating, liquor drinking and other indulgences. They would also have to aban-

don cultivation; because cultivation does not remove poverty or eradicate famines, but merely causes unnecessary hardship to cattle. The Oraons would also have to give up work as labourers for other communities. Good days would be coming soon, and then the Oraons would not have to bear any hardship either in this world or in the next. Moreover, God had given to Jatra certain songs or spells by which fever, styes and other ailments could be cured.

At about this time in village Birkuri in Ghaelhra thani an Oraon woman fell unconscious while bathing in a tank, and began to utter repeatedly the sounds 'Bom-Bom'. After regaining consciousness she too began to spread the message of a new religion. Very soon the movement for this religion spread throughout Ranchi district, and at several places new preceptors appeared like Jatra. Ultimately it crossed the boundaries of Ranchi district and spread among the Oraons of Palamau district in the west and Hazanibagh district in the north. The name of the new religion became Kurukh Dharma, since Kurukh is another name for the Oraon tribe.

The Oraons came to believe that this was the pure religion which they had practised in the past before they came into contact with the Mundas. On entering the fold of the Kurukh religion, the devotees began to practise strict ritual purity. So much so that at certain places they abandoned cultivation and gave back their land to the zamindars. Taking fright at this the class of landlords and traders tried to repress the movement with the help of the police. But the Tana Bhigats would not be drawn into conflict with anyone. In every village in their own community, wherever they found anything to be impure or inauspicious, they sought to 'pull' it out and have it thrown away by collectively praying and singing hymns to God. Hence the followers of the Kurukh religion are called Tana (which means to pull) Bhagats.

We get a detailed account of the Tana Bhagat movement in S C Roy's book, *Oraon Religion and Customs* I give below, with a translation, an example of the kind of hymn they sang to drive away misfortune. The hymn is in the local Hindi dialect

Tana baba, tana, bhutanike tana

Tana baba tana, tan ton tana,

Tnna baha, tana, kona kuchi bhutanike tana
 Tana biba, tana, tan ton tana;
 Tana baba, tana, lukal chhapal bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana,
 Tnna baba, tana, garha dhipa bhutanike tana
 Tani bibi, tana, tan ton tana;
 Tnna babi, tani, pesal prisal bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana,
 Tani baba, tana, daini bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana;
 Chandra baba, suraj baba
 Dharti hiba, taregan baba
 Namse arji mangte hai—
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana,
 Dainike nasan thapal bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana;
 Bapake manal deoa bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana,
 Aja par-aja manal deoa bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana;
 Murgi-khaiya bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana,
 Kara-khriya bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana,
 Bhera-khaiya bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana,
 Admi-khaiya bhutanike tana
 Tana baba, tana, tan ton tana

[Pull father, pull, pull out the spirits Pull, father, pull, pull, the
 spirits hiding in corners and turnings, pull father, pull, pull, heave
 and pull Pull father, pull, pull the spirits that live in hiding,
 pull father, pull, pull, heave and pull Pull father, pull, pull the
 spirits in ditches and mounds; pull father, pull, pull, heave and pull
 Pull father, pull, pull the spirits of persons slain, pull
 father, pull, pull, heave and pull Pull father, pull, pull the
 spirits of the witches, pull father, pull, pull, heave and pull O
 father sun ! O father moon ! O father earth ! O father stars !
 In the names of you all we pray; pull father, pull, pull, heave
 and pull Pull the spirits set to work by the witches; pull father,

pull, pull, heave and pull Pull the spirits to whom our fathers made vows, pull father, pull, pull, heave and pull Pull the spirits to whom our grandfathers and great grandfathers made vows, pull father, pull, pull, beave and pull Pull the spirits that feed on (sacrificial) fowls, pull father, pull pull heave and pull Pull the spirits that feed on buffaloes, pull father, pull pull, heave and pull Pull the spirits that feed on sheep, pull father, pull, pull, heave and pull Pull the spirits that feed on men, pull father, pull, pull beave and pull]

In 1914-15, when the Great War was on in addition to the sun, the moon and the other deities, the Oraons occasionally sent their prayers also to their 'German' father. Similarly the Oraons prayed ceaselessly for the uprooting of many things which they considered harmful, in addition to the spirits and goblins. I give below a few stanzas from these prayers

Tana baba tana agniboteke¹⁸ tana
 Tana baba tina railgarike¹⁹ tana
 Tana baba tina bicycleke²⁰ tana
 Tana baba tana

The Tanas sought to root out from their ancient folk culture everything that might be regarded as degrading in the eyes of the Brahmins. As a result, their anger was directed not only to spirits and goblins, but equally to widow remarriage, divorcee, the free mixing of young men and women, songs, festivities, dances, colourful garments and garments with decorated borders. Given below is a translation of a long passage extracted from an Oraon book of instructions written for this purpose. The reader may feel a little irritated by the many repetitions but if we are to get some direct familiarity with Oraon ways of thought, we will require a little patience. The translation will also give us a fair idea of the nature of traditional and current Oraon culture. The Oraon Tana Bhagats believe that nothing in the dialogue given below or in the hymns quoted above has been composed by men they are all words of God.

O God, you are our father, tell us shall we take life or not ?
 No Shall we eat the flesh of birds cocks pigs she-goats and
 he goats ? No Then is it completely forbidden to take life ?
 It is completely forbidden to take life knowingly Shall the
 ghosts and spirits continue to be ? They shall not be, they have

run away O father, shall the wizard and the witch continue to be ? They shall not be, they have run away O father, shall sorcery continue to be ? No, it has gone away O father, shall we take fermented and distilled liquor ? No, if we do, we will go to hell O father, shall the *akhra* (the village dancing ground) and the *jhakra* (the grove of primeval trees in the village where the village deity resides, corresponding to the *sarna* of the Mundas) continue to be ? No, they have been put an end to O father, shall none of the festivals remain ? No, they shall not remain, they are gone O father, shall the dancing and hunting festivals continue to be ? No, they shall not be, they have been put an end to

The Karim, Jitiya, Dashhara, Sohrai, Deothan, Jadura, Phugua and Khaddi festivals, all forms of dancing, playing on musical instruments such as *madal*, *nagra jhany*, the use of the *chamar*, the *tota*, the *turra*, the turban, coloured loincloths and girdles, among ornaments, the *chandoa*, *punthi*, *hansuli*, *bala*, *sunko* and *ghungur*, for young men and women to sleep in the *dhumkuria* (= the *giti ora* of the Mundas), for them to freely mix with each other, to touch each other, to hold hands, to cohabit wrongfully, to embroider the borders (of dresses), to wear the *bala* or the *kosuti bala*, to wear rings on the fingers or the toes to wear earrings or nose rings, to put sticks through the ear-holes, to wear the ornaments known as *jhikachulpi* and *mulri*, to make friendships of the *sengat* or *mitali* form, to practise the forms of marriage prevalent in the Kaliyuga, to make liquor to offer oblations to the ancestors, to kill cocks or pigs for the wedding feast, to drink liquor, to cook pork, to strain liquor, to give others liquor to drink, at the wedding ceremony for the parents of the bride and groom to kiss each other, for them to climb on to each other's shoulders, to embrace each other, to eat the rice balls made from the dregs of the rice beer, to serve pork, to engage drummers at the wedding, to sing or ceremonially weep at the wedding, to apply vermillion and to perform the *danda katta* rite at the wedding—these evil practices are forbidden

Say, father are these evil practices forbidden or not ? Yes, they are forbidden Say, whether or not the *akhra* and the *jhakra* will remain according to the ancient practice, at the

karam, jitiya, dashara and *sohrai* festivals at wedding feasts as in the past, the *jadur, sarhul, phagua* and *khariyo* dances, can we perform these or not? No, these will not be. Shall the *karam* dance remain or not? No. Shall it be allowed to go to the *akhro* or not? No. Shall illicit unions be allowed or not? No. Shall it be permitted for young men and women to mix freely or not? No. Shall it be allowed to play the *madal, nagra* and *dhak* or not? No

Collecting cowdung, catching fish and crabs, catching rats in the months of Agraayan and Pous (as at present), roasting rats, fish and birds for food is forbidden. It is forbidden to quarrel. It is forbidden for young men and women to be together on the uplands and lowlands as they do in the months of Agraayan, Pous, Magh and Phalgon while they go to collect cowdung carrying fried eatables with them. Boys and girls are forbidden to offer worship to the spirit named *Sabhapati* and to other spirits. It is forbidden to offer oblations of water to the dead. It is forbidden to offer worship in the name of the spirits, *Mua, Marech Darha* and *Deswali*. Sacrificing cocks, whetting the knife for the sacrifice, sacrificing buffaloes and pigs, whetting the axe for their sacrifice, sacrificing a ram or an ox by beating it to death, to remember the names of the dead, drinking spirits, drinking beer, preparing or buying ingredients for making beer, preparing liquor, going to liquor shops drinking beer or liquor to quarrel with any man, and to covet what others possess. all this is forbidden

The festivals which were observed in the past in Oraon society such as the Pous festival, the Magh festival, the Phagu festival, the Chait festival, the Jadura dance, the dance of the full moon in Magh (for selecting the head of the Dhumkuria on the full moon in Magh), moving the grind stone at Kanti puja, moving the grind stone in the name of the deity of the Jhakra for selecting the village Mahato and the Nayega, putting by rice for the worship is forbidden feeding the cock before sacrificing it is forbidden, observing Jonkh Chandi and Pachgi Chandi is forbidden, performing the Danda katta ceremony is forbidden, applying vermilion is forbidden, the Amkharna ceremony (at the time of the name giving of a child) is forbidden, ceremonial friendships such as *sengat* and *mitali*

among the youth are forbidden, sacrificing the cock and the goat is forbidden, preparing and serving *suri* (ritual offering of rice boiled with meat) are forbidden

Decorating the dancing ground is forbidden, the dancing of men and women is forbidden

The prayers and hymns of the Tana Bhagat are, however, not all negative in outlook. Some of the songs give indications of lofty ideas. I give below the translation of one such song

Come, God our Father, come to our courtyard, come to our door. O Brethren, you cry 'Father', 'Father', but Father is in our body, he is in our hearts. O Brethren, do not quarrel with anyone, (for) Father resides in our hearts. You cry 'Father', 'Father' in vain (for) Father dwells in our hearts. Father dwells in our bodies, so do not abuse each other on the streets and on the lanes. Being dear to your father and to your mother, carrying small baskets (?) in your hands, unite with each other (in love). Being dear to your uncle and to your aunt, carrying small baskets in your hands, unite with each other (in love).

The Tana movement with its doctrinaire approach and its obsessive concern for purity made a considerable upheaval among the Oraons as a consequence of which many changes came to be seen in their life as a whole. The Tana Bhagats altered and purified all their social rites and sacraments. They also tried to save themselves from the exploitation of other groups, mainly the landlords and traders. At a certain time (in 1920), a man named Shibu Bhagat, after getting a large number of Tana Bhagats to abandon their ploughs and plough cattle and to put their faith in God, led them towards the Satpahari hills in Hazaribagh district. He was convinced that God would appear to them there, and that there would be an end to the trials and tribulations of the Oraons.

S C Roy has expressed the view that although the Tana Bhagat movement might on the face of it appear to be a religious movement, it was really rooted in the Oraons' desire to free themselves from their condition of dire poverty. When their misguided efforts did not bear any fruit, the Kurukh Dharma faded away from Ranchi and Hazaribagh districts in due course.

Conclusion

It will be clear from the discussion above that, compared to the Juangs and Pauri Bhuiyans, the influence of the Aryan or Brahminical civilization over the Mundas and Oraons was greater in extent and depth. But tribes like the Juangs and Savaras or the Mundas and Oraons have come out of the shadow of their forests and entered into economic and cultural relations with other communities only during the last few centuries. Their linguistic identity remains intact even to this day, and their folk customs and local habits bear in many spheres clear traces of their past condition. But if we analyse closely the culture of the different communities which form a part of the Brahminically governed Aryan Society, we will see that the process of finding a place for other communities within the *varnashram* system has been going on in India for many centuries and that, as a result of this, many peoples have almost given up their individual identities so as to nourish and enrich the wider Hindu society. Along with this, they have extended their own horizons and thus enriched themselves. By discussing some of these communities we will be able to proceed further in our understanding of the nature and ideals of Aryan civilization.

Notes

1 The five parganas

2 The customary way of proclaiming the name of Hari or the Lord Vishnu

3 The river Jamuna and the *Kadans* tree are sacred to Krishna and the flute is his symbol

4 These are varieties of fish eaten commonly by Bengalis for which I know neither the Mundari nor the English terms

5 The Sandilya gotra is a well known Brahmanical gotra

6 Chaitra is the last month of the Bengali calendar covering the period from mid March to mid April. Baisakh and Jaittha are the first two months

7 I have translated *gajan* as 'festival' and *sannasi* as 'ascetic'. The author is describing a tribal festival by using analogous categories of the Charak

festivals, a popular festival in Bengal so that his meaning becomes immediately clear to his Bengali readers. The whole point of the description is to bring out the similarities between the Munda and the Charak festivals.

8 *Kandh* means shoulder in both Bengali and the local variant of Hindi.

9 *Phul* means flower and *kudna* means to leap.

10 The *para* is a traditional territorial division; see Chapter 2 above.

11 This is an open air dramatic performance common in Bengal.

12 *Bhumi* is earth and *phut* is to pierce, *bhumphut* signifies something that has emerged by piercing its way through the earth.

13 *Nemha* being a form of *nlyam* which means regulation.

14 *Kan* = ear, *phut* = pierce, hence *Kan phut*, similarly, *Bachchhidan* from *Bachchlu* = calf, *dan* = gift.

15. Steamboat, literally fireboat

16 Railway carriage.

17 Bicycle

The Kulus or Telis

WHEN, before the Second World War, Hitler was trying to reorganize the productive system of the German nation in order to meet the requirements of war, he had but one objective which was to increase food production as far as possible within the boundaries of the German state. At that time the German scientists published, on the basis of different types of research, a variety of books for the instruction of the people. Some of these have been described in a book published by G D H Cole under the name of *Practical Economics*. In one of these hooklets the German people were urged to eat more fish and rabbit meat in place of other types of meat, rabbits because they breed very fast and, fish because they are available in the rivers and seas, no land needs to be tied down for their culture. It has been calculated that the calorific value of the food that we get from beef raised on a given extent of land can be multiplied tenfold by raising wheat on the same extent of land and twentyfold by raising potatoes on it. Likewise, it is more profitable to get fats by raising oilseeds than by depending on butter and other animal fats, in other words it is possible to produce oil for meeting the requirements of a large number of people from a small area of land. That is why the cultivation of soya beans was increased in Germany, or in other words, the lack of animal food can be made good to a large extent by vegetable proteins and fats.

The remarkable fact is that in China and India men had arrived on the basis of long experience very close to the truth which European scientists had discovered under pressure of war and the need to support a large population on a small area of land. These

two countries have a density of population that one rarely encounters in any other part of the world. It is true that in industrialized countries like England and Germany the density of population is very high, but people here are able to procure their food from far and wide. If we take all these areas into account, we will find that the population which the European productive organization is able to support by extracting the food supply from a given square mile of land is smaller than the corresponding population that can be supported in China or India. But unhappily, for lack of adequate scientific research or for other reasons, even though these countries produce per square mile enough food to support a large population, the people there do not enjoy prosperity. For all the toil that they put in, they are able to eke out only a bare existence. Perhaps the proper application of science can help to reduce the burden of toil, or, for the same measure of toil, yield a higher level of satisfaction for men.

Apart from this, we find that in densely populated countries like China, Japan, Java, Siam, Burma and India men depend entirely on local production for their food supply rather than on imports. For a long time in these countries the protein and fat requirements have been met by growing pulses, lentils, nuts etc., and a large variety of oilseeds such as peanuts, mustard, linseed, coconuts, soya beans and *sargoya*. Even among animal products, instead of the flesh of cows and buffaloes, they have developed a preference for milk and milk products and for fish, poultry, pork and goat meat. This is because these animals breed rapidly or do not need much tending. In other words, the path which Germany had chosen due to pressure of war had been adopted in South and Southeast Asian countries long ago due to pressure of population. This is something we must note with particular care.

Oilpressers and the Use of Oil in India

What I wish to say in any case is that the productive arrangements described above have prevailed in India for a long time. When a particular craft is practised in a large country it is natural that in course of time some differences will develop in its practice in the different parts of the country. If we examine the kinds of differences that have developed in the implements used for extracting oil in India, we will learn many new facts.

In India oil is more widely used in Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Madras and Bomhay¹, but the particular oil in use varies from one area to another. Mustard, sesame, groundnut, coconut and linseed are used in different areas. The further to the northwest we travel from Bihar the more steadily do we find a decline in the use of oil and, along with it, of fish, these are replaced by milk and ghee. However, if we go right upto Kashmir we will find once again the use of fish and of linseed oil. If we compare the use of oil in the different regions we get the impression that the use of oil and of fish was absent from the culture which prevailed in the past in Punjab, Rajputana and the United Provinces. Oil was perhaps a characteristic product and marker of ancient Indian culture, this is why we find its widespread use throughout the country outside of northwest India.

In those parts of India where the use of oil is predominant we find the use of a variety of techniques and implements. While discussing Kol culture we mentioned a technique of oil extraction by means of pressure applied to two wooden hoards. One also sees the Kols themselves making use of the oil mill when no Oilpressers are near at hand, but for fear of losing caste they use human and not cattle traction for turning the mill. In Hindu society the Telis or Oilpresser caste is regarded as a low caste whose work is not acceptable², this is why others are very reluctant to adopt their occupation for fear of losing caste or being degraded.

But if we investigate the matter a little closely, we will find that the social status of the Telis is by no means everywhere the same in the Bengal Bihar Orissa region. In the northern part of Orissa there is a small state known as Seraikela³. Here we find a convergence of three languages, Bengali from the east, Bihar from the west and Oriya from the south. Now, there are also three types of oil presses in use in Seraikela

- (i) drawn by two hullocks, without a pipe and made from a single block of wood,
- (ii) drawn by one hullock, with a pipe and made from a single block of wood,
- (iii) drawn by one hullock, with a pipe, but made from two blocks of wood and with a wooden bowl attached

1. In the first type the grinding tree is made from a single block of sal wood. This is dug into the earth so that about a cubit and

a half is above the surface, and between three and four cubits or even more is in the ground. The hollow which is scooped out at the top of the grinding tree is shaped somewhat like the inside of a water pot. This is constructed by the Teli or Oilpresser himself, without the help of a carpenter.

The mill is called *ghana*. The rod which grinds the seeds is known as *lathi*. The plank to which the two bullocks are yoked is called *panjari*. The *panjari* has attached to it another piece of wood called *banshpatti* whose curved mouth is known as *magarmuhi*. The yoke is attached to the *panjari* by means of the *is*. On the *panjari* is erected a rod called *malkum* which has two or three holes. On top of the *malkum* is a bent stick of wood called *bankia* which has a small hole into which is fitted the upper end of the *lathi*. Among the loose components is a crowbar or *shabal* with a slightly curved end. This is used for scooping out the oil cake. And there is a piece of wood known as *kathi* to which are tied strips of dirty cloth which help to suck out the oil.

The seeds are put into the mill after being moistened with water. A heavy stone is placed on the *panjari* and the man who drives the bullocks also stands on it. When the oil collects after a bit of grinding, the upper crust of the oil cake is broken with the help of the crowbar and the oil is sucked up by dipping the cotton strips of the *kathi* and finally squeezed into a small earthen pot.

The Oilpressers who have two bullocks to their mill say that water is accepted from them by the Brahmins and Vaishnavs. I suspect that this is not true. Be that as it may, the name of their caste is Teli and their surname Parihari. They never work their mill with one bullock or put blinkers on their bullocks or carve a hole into their mill.

2. The second type of grinding tree is dug two cubits into the ground with a cubit and a half above it. On top it has a hollow scooped into it as in the first type, but at the bottom it has a hole and a pipe fixed into it through which the oil flows out.

The mill is called *ghana*. The pipe through which the oil flows out is known as *nerijo*, beneath this is placed a pot with a spout. The grinding rod is called *lathum*. The wooden plank is placed above the ground and is known as *kater*. I missed noting the name of the wooden post fixed to the *kater*, the bent piece of wood attached to that is called *dhenka*. The *dhenka* has two or

three small holes into which the upper end of the *lathim* is inserted. The yoke is loosely attached to the *lathim*. A transverse pole is tied to the end of the *kater* along with it, the name of this is *gali*. The operator sits on the *kater* with his legs dangling and also puts a piece of stone on it for weight.

Sitting in the house of Dhanu Gorain in village Surtadi, I asked how they differed from the Panharis of Manikbajar who work their mills with two bullocks. In reply an elderly woman said, "They are Do baldiyas¹, we are Ek-baldiyas"². I also learnt that

(a) the Do baldiyas have a longer grinding stick and the Ek baldiyas have a shorter one, only two cubits in length. For this reason they can work their mills inside the house which the Do-baldiyas cannot.

(b) The plank on which the operator sits for driving the bullocks almost touches the ground among the Do-baldiyas, but must be well above the ground among the Ek baldiyas or else the receptacle into which the oil flows will break.

(c) Both castes practise *sanga* or widow remarriage.

3 The third type of mill is also drawn by a single bullock. The name of the mill is *ghana*. On top there is a huge bowl-shaped receptacle made from a separate block of wood and called *plnrl*. The grinding stick is known as *jath*. Attached to the upper part of the *jath* is an elegantly curved wooden piece called *makri*. At the back of the *makri* is an orifice through which a cord is passed for attaching it to the vertical pole or *maththam khunta*. The *maththam khunta* stands vertically on the plank. The end of the plank which touches the *ghana* has a wooden piece joined to it and known as *golot*. The pipe near the bottom of the *ghana* from which the oil comes out is known as *patnali*. The oil flows into an earthen pot placed below. A rotating stick is inserted into the *ghana* for turning the oilseeds, the name of this is *sankri*. The bullocks have leather blinkers over their eyes. They are yoked by means of a transverse pole known as *kainurt*.

According to the Kulus³ who operate the third type of mill, the wood of the peepul, banyan or *neem* tree makes better mills than the wood of the *sal*. Yet, in this part of the world the *sal* tree grows freely, and the other two castes of Telis both use mills made from *sal*. It may be that the third caste of Kulus

came from an area where the *sal* was scarce so that their preferences were differently determined.

When I asked two Kulus named Ghasiram Gorain and Maheshwar Gorain of village Naranpur about the Gorains of Surtadi, I got the following information:

(a) 'We are a part of the Ekadas Teli⁷ group, we are Kulus by caste. In this village there are also people of the Dwadas Teli⁸ group, but they do not extract oil, they engage in trade. We are lower in status than the Rarhi Kulus⁹ because our forefathers introduced the practice of second marriage, i.e. widow remarriage.'

(b) 'We have no relationship with the Do baldiya Telis of Manikbajar or the Ek-baldiya Telis of Surtadi. They both come from the Orissa side. We are from Bengal in the east (i.e. they have come from the east, but not from East Bengal). We have been here for three or four generations. We came from Shikharbhumi (Shikharbhumi is situated to the east of Barabhum in Manbhum district).

(c) 'There is no exchange of water between us and those of Surtadi. They eat fowl and drink liquor. They are probably Maghiya' (i.e., from Magadh in Bihar).

A few days later I returned to the Ek baldiya Telis in Surtadi village and asked them about the Kulus of Naranpur. Dhanu Gorain said, 'The people in the Bengali shahi (Bengali quarters) of Naranpur are Shikhriyas (from Shikharbhumi). They have a *piuri* on their mill, we do not.'

A Discussion on the Telis

Now let us investigate from where the three types of oil mills prevalent in Seraijela have come. The practice of widow remarriage is prevalent among the Do baldiya and Ek baldiya Telis. Of the two the Ek baldiya Gorains are a little lower because they consume liquor and fowl. Even though the Kulus, who operate the mill with a *piuri* are *ajal chal*¹⁰, they regard themselves as superior to the Maghiyas because they do not consume liquor or fowl. But because of the practice of widow remarriage, they regard themselves as lower than the Rarhi Telis and the Dwadas Telis.

We do not have a complete description of all the oil mills found in the different regions of India and the names of all

their parts. But there is a lot of similarity between the single block mill with a pipe found in Seraikela and the oil mill from Bihar which has been described in great detail by Mr Grierson in his book, *Bihar Peasant Life*. What is called *ghana* here is known in Bihar as *kolhu*. In Bihar the term *ghani* or *ghan* is used to signify the quantity of oilseeds which can be ground in the mill at a time. *Ghan* also signifies in Bihar the amount of grain that can at a time be put into a mortar or a grindstone, or the amount of foodstuffs that can be put into a cauldron. What is called *neriya* in Seraikela is in Bihar called *niroh* or *narah*. The latter is known as *kanri* in Bihar. The *lathum*, however, is called *jath* as in Bengal. The *dhenka* of the Ek-baldivas becomes *dheka* or *dhekua* in Bihar. But *garu* is here *chhana*. In other words, the terms used by the so-called Maghiya Telis and those actually used in Bihar are similar in many respects and dissimilar in some.

I am told that the mill made from a single block of wood is in use in East Bengal in Noakhali, Sylhet and other districts, but I have not been able to collect the names by which they call the different parts.

The mill without any outlet and drawn by two bullocks is in use in the mofussil areas of Puri district, in Ganjam district and in Andhra. Apparently there are a few mills of this type still in use in the Arambagh subdivision of Hooghly district. This is the type of mill still in use in the southern part of the Contai subdivision of Midnapore district. The Gujarat oil mill is also of this type.

The Kulus of Naranpur clearly regard themselves as Bengalis.¹¹ In Nadia district or in the 24 Parganas the mill commonly used is the one with a *pinti* or a separate top. This is true also in Hooghly, Burdwan and Birbhum. It may be prevalent elsewhere too, but we do not have detailed descriptions of craft practices for the whole of India which is why we face difficulties at every step in making comparative or historical analyses.

Our brief investigation of the Oilpressers of Seraikela has led us to see that the Telis are divided into several branches. Each uses a mill with some distinctive features and, further, there are differences between the branches in their food habits and marriage customs. If we enquire into the history of the different

branches we learn that some are of Orissa, some have links with Bihar and others have come from Bengal. Each retains its distinctive features in the practice of its craft and refrains from marriage with the others. It is a common characteristic of every kind of caste or subcaste¹² to restrict marriage relations within itself.

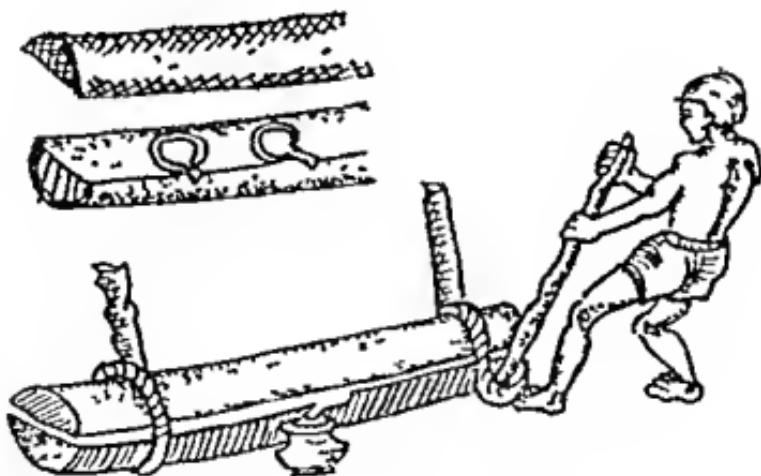
At the same time it is not true that there is a great deal of difference between the two types of single bullock mills. If the mill with the *pnri* is confined to West Bengal and Assam on the one side and Bihar and further west on the other, then we may have to say that the latter type is relatively older and the former developed at a later stage and has therefore remained more restricted in its distribution. If we can find out the districtwise distribution of the mill drawn by two bullocks but without an outlet and of the one drawn by a single bullock and with an outlet we may be able to say something about the historical connections between the two.

We have to note how, among the oilpressers differences of technology and craft practices on the one hand and of social and commensal practices on the other have led to the emergence of subcastes. It would not be unreasonable to say that they have perhaps emerged because of the adoption at different places of superior craft practices or of commensal and social customs regarded as superior. In discussing Oraon and Kol culture we saw that certain sections had emerged among them as a result of attempts at the imitation of the ritually pure Brahminical customs but the ties of marriage did not break between these sections. Only in certain cases as among the Tana Bhagats there were indications of that. But between the different branches of the Oil presser group one finds an absence of marriage relations.

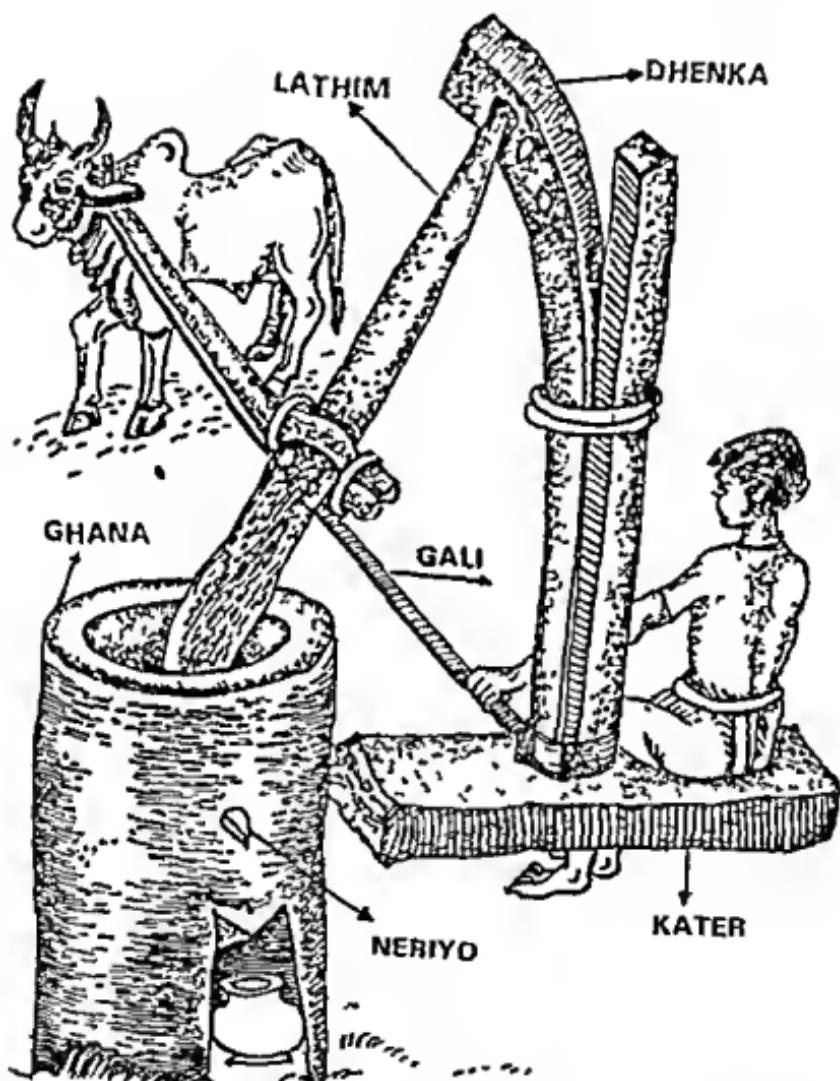
In India when among those who accept caste distinctions some new commensal or social practices are introduced or when some change or improvement in craft practices takes place this may be immediately followed by the emergence of a new branch whose members seek to confine the ties of marriage to their own small group. We have learnt thus much about the nature of caste but this is not all that there is to caste.



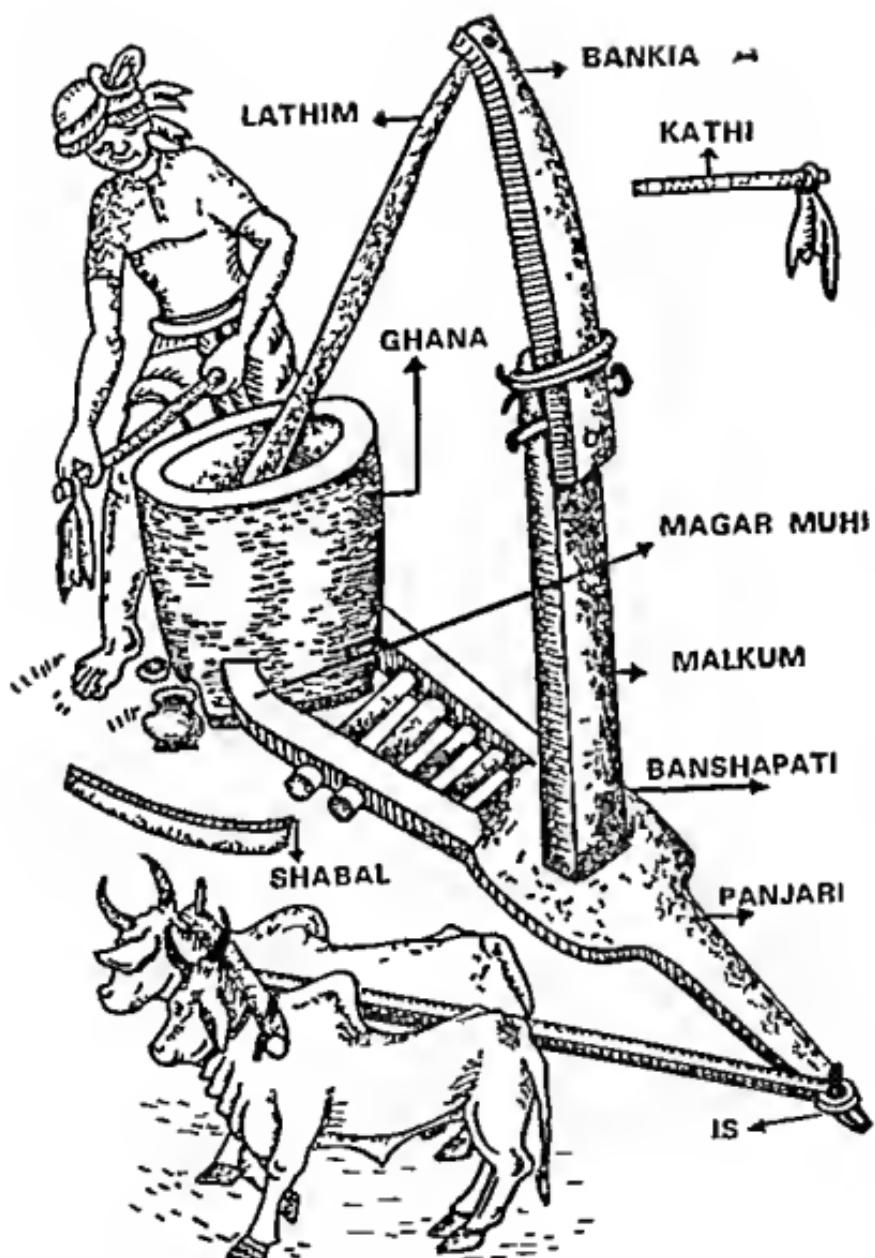
Mill Made of Vertical Wooden Plank



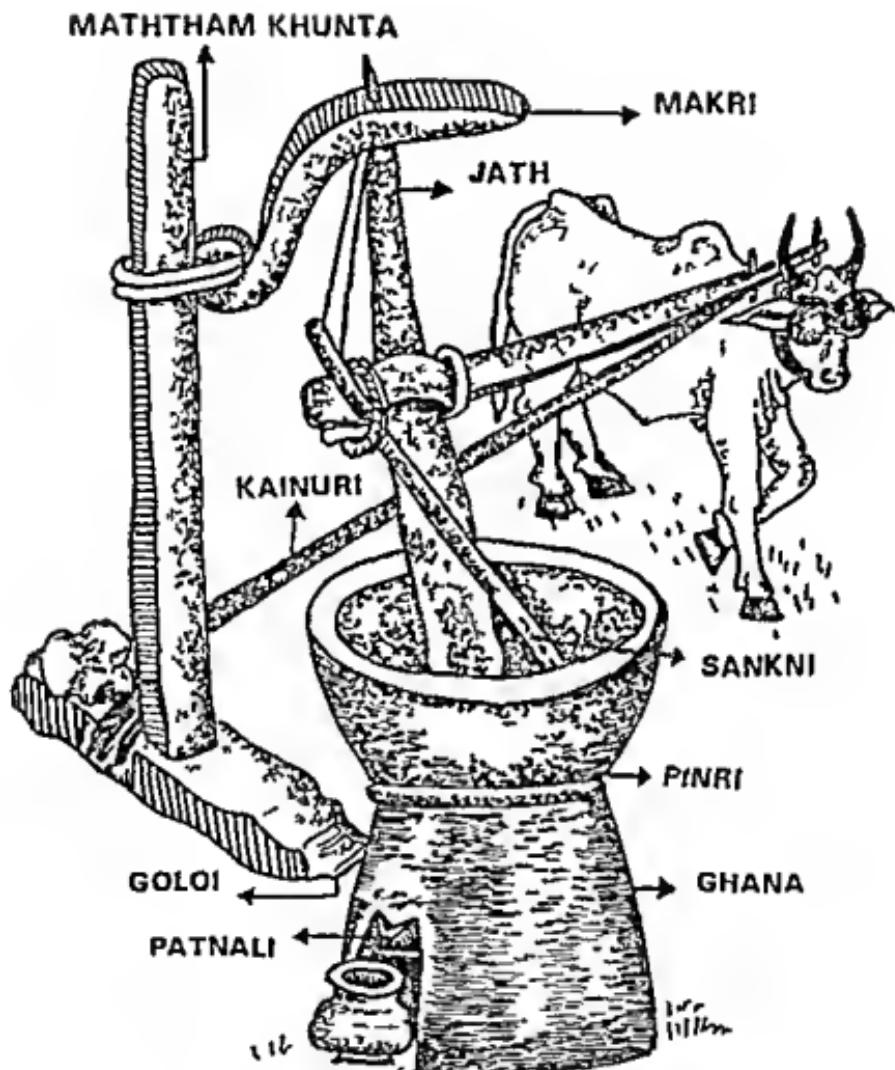
Mill Made of Two Horizontal Wooden Planks



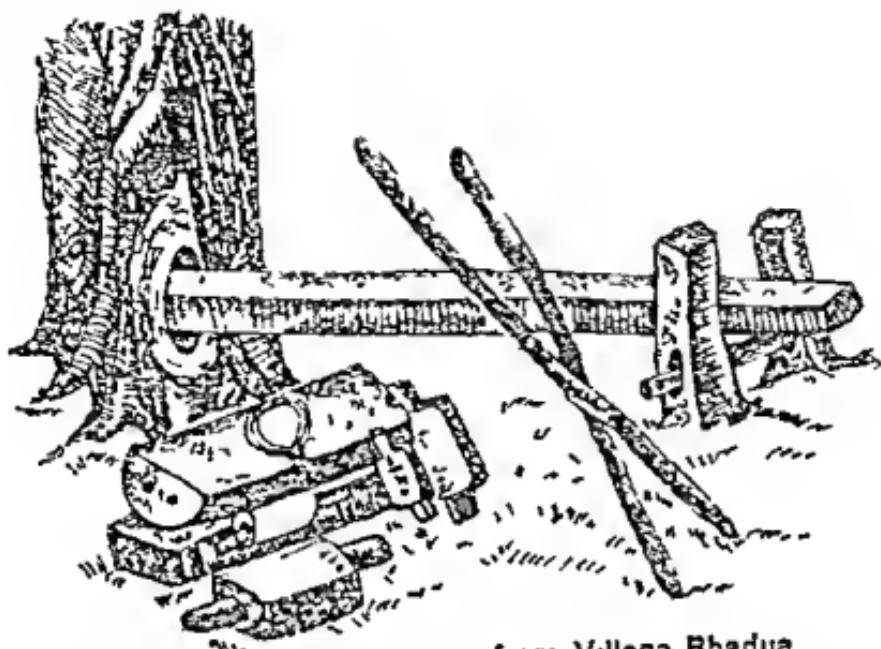
One-piece Wooden Mill with Pipe, Drawn by Single Bullock



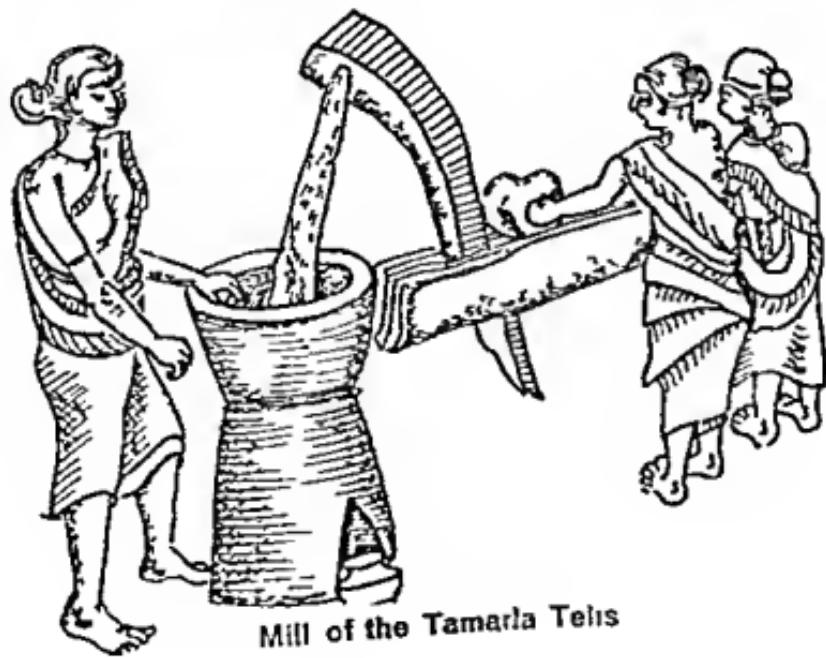
Wooden Mill without Pipe, Drawn by Two Bullocks



Mill with Bowl and Pipe, Drawn by Single Bullock



Tree press from Villaga Bhadua



Mill of the Tamaria Telis

(Continued from page 80.)

Notes

1. I have left the place names as in the text in spite of the many changes in the map of India since the book was written.
2. The author follows the distinction prevalent in Eastern India between *jal chal* ('water acceptable') and *ajal chal* ('water unacceptable') castes.
3. Now in Singhbhum district in Bihar.
4. Two-bullock people.
5. One-bullock people.
6. Teli and Kolu are both terms for Oilpressers but they might signify different groups of Oilpressers.
7. Literally 'Eleven Telis'.
8. Literally 'Twelve Telis'.
9. The Kolus of the Rath region of West Bengal.
10. See note 2 above.
11. Manbhum, where they are from, would generally be regarded as being on the periphery of the Bengali culture area.
12. *Upajati*, for which I have used 'suteaste' here might also mean 'tribe'.

The Establishment of Aryan Society in India

IN INDIA there was a time when, like the Vaishnava, Shakta and Shaiva sects, there was a sun worshipping sect of Sauriyas. Historians have inferred from a scientific analysis of the Puranic texts that Shamba, the son of Krishna by his non Aryan wife, was responsible for introducing the worship of the sun god as prevalent in the northern countries. Probably a class of priests brought the worship of the sun god or Mitra into India from a region situated north of Afghanistan and southeast of the Aral Sea. In ancient times the Mitra worshipping sect of magi was quite important in Persia. But the rise of Zarathustra and his religious reformation led to their exile from Persia. It is likely that one of their branches came to seek shelter in India from Shakadvip or the area north of Afghanistan referred to above.

It is written in the shastras about this Shakadvip that their priests bore the name of Maga. They were adept in the astral sciences. When these priests of the Maga group found a place in Indian society, they were given a position in the Brahmin *varna*. Only they had to accept a lower status than all other Brahmins.

We have to take note of the ways in which subcastes emerge within a caste, and communities coming from different lands are allotted to a particular *varna* according to their traditional occupation. If we examine the history of the Kshatriya *varna* we will find numerous examples of this. The non Aryan rulers of the Kandhs in Orissa and the Gonds in Madhya Pradesh were in course of time able to acquire the status of Kshatriyas by the grace

of Brahmin priests who found honour and employment with them, while at the same time making their rites and practices more ritually pure or Brahminical. Such happenings are not altogether uncommon in Indian history. What we are able to see is that the *varna* order of Indian society became increasingly complex by thus finding a place within itself for exterior communities, or by creating divisions and subdivisions internally as a result of the improvement of the craft techniques or of the purification of the ritual customs followed by particular groups.

Ramayana and Mahabharata

We have evidence from a story in the Ramayana that in the past even members of the Shudra *varna* sought to practise religious austerities in the manner of the twice-born. A certain Brahmin had a son who was faced with premature death. The grief-stricken Brahmins felt that this was due to the misrule of Sri Ramachandra and decided to fast unto death in the royal assembly. Fearing that he might have to face the responsibility for the death of so many Brahmins, the king persuaded them to desist for a while, and set about to investigate in which part of his kingdom the abomination had taken place. I present an account of the subsequent events from Chapters 87 and 91 of the Uttarakanda of the Ramayana.

Thereafter King Rama, coming southward, observed the expansive lake on the south side of the Shailagiri in the Vindhya mountains. The noble Raghunandan witnessed the ascetic, with face downwards, engaged in the practice of his austerities. Maharaja Raghava, approaching the ascetic, engaged in the practice of his excellent austerities said to him, "O man of noble vows! You are blessed! O you who have grown old in your vows! I am Rama, the son of Dasharath. I am asking you from curiosity, you who are firm in your power, in which caste were you born? You, who practise these austerities which are so arduous for others, what is the boon that you desire? Is it your prayer to attain heaven, or some other boon? O ascetic! I long to hear of the goal in whose pursuit you have adopted these austerities. Are you a Brahmin? Or an invincible Kshatriya? Or of the third *varna* of Vaishyas? Or a Shudra? Good will befall you, so speak truly."

The ascetic with his face suspended downwards, being thus

asked by the King, described to the unexcelled Raghava his caste and his reason for adopting austerities

The ascetic, hearing the above words of the indefatigable Rama, replied, remaining with his face downwards all the while, "O most renowned ! I was born of the womb of a Shudra By following these harsh austerities, I wish to conquer the heavens and to become a god in my own bodily form I am not speaking falsely to you O Kakutsthha ! Know me as the Shudra named Shambuka" Even while Sbambuka was speaking thus, Rama, taking out from its sheath his tastefully wrought and immaculate falchion, struck off his head When the Shudra died, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Brahma and the other gods, having praised Kakutasthha Ramachandra by saying Sadhu ! Sadhul caused a noble rain of flowers

The attempts that we saw among the Kols or Oraons to become a part of Hindu society by purifying their customs were not in the past confined to a few individuals like Shambuka, but were present among many castes of which there is excellent proof in the Mahabharata We do not know for certain when the Shantiparva of the Mahabharata was composed but there is no doubt that it is very ancient In Chapter 65 of the Shantiparva it is written,

Mandhata said, O God Suranath ! The Yavanas, Kiratas, Gandharvas, Chinas, Savaras, Barbaras, Shakas, Tusharas, Kankas, Pabnavas, Andhtas, Madras, Paundras, Pulindas, Rama-thas, Kambojas the lower in birth among the progeny of the Brahmans and Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas and Shudras who live in the kingdom : in what manner will they observe dharma, and in what manner will men like me set the Dasyus on the path of right conduct ? I wish to hear these things from you alone, for you are the principal friend of us Kshatriyas Indra said, it is the duty of every Dasyu to serve his mother, father, teacher, preceptor, the hermits and the kings The rites prescribed in the Vedas and the sacred offerings are prescribed as duties for the Shudras also They will, according to the occasion, give wells, sources of drinking water, beds and other gifts to the twiceborn It is the duty of the Dasyus to observe right conduct in the regular practice of non violence, truth, freedom from anger, purity and freedom from envy, the

practice of their occupation, the fulfilment of their debts and the maintenance of their wives and children. It is the duty of those Dasyus who are desirous of splendour to bestow gifts as prescribed in the *shastras* after performing all manner of ritual sacrifices, and to make food offerings to all the spirits after performing lavish food sacrifices. O sinless king! These acts have been prescribed from the past for the Dasyus and it is the duty of all to act in these ways. Mandhata said, in the human world, in the four *ashramas* and in all the *varnas*, the Dasyus at present disappear through change of caste [*lingantara*], what is the reason for this? Indra said, O holy one! When the principles of governance are corrupted and the obligations of royal office are rejected by the king's tyranny, the people become totally enmeshed in the web of illusion. Great king! When this Satyayuga comes to an end, these hermitages will be replaced, and numberless mendicants bearing matted locks and other symbols will roam the world. Overcome by anger and lust, they will scorn the beatitude of the ancient religions and adopt immoral ways. But if these sinful ways are stopped by the rule of punishment [*dandaniti*], that auspicious, supreme and eternal religion will never be shaken.

In other words, at least from the age of the *Mababharata* we see various communities enter into the *varna* system. When the king's rule was weakened, various non Aryan groups entered the different *varnas* by the process of *lingantara*. It was prescribed as their duty to follow the rules, customs and sacrificial ceremonies established by the decree of the Brahmins.

The Objectives of the *Varna* System According to the *Strutis* and the *Smritis*

When we read the above texts we are naturally inclined to ask what the objectives were of the *chaturvarna* system which came into being in India. If we can reach a clear understanding of this question, it will be relatively easy for us to comprehend the various transformations the system underwent in the different historical periods. With that end in view we have to engage in a brief discussion of the ancient scriptural texts.

In the *Purushasukta* hymn of the *Rigveda* there is a verse which says that of the primeval man 'the Brahmin was the mouth, the Rajanya was as the arms, his thighs were the Vaishyas and

from his two feet the Shudra was born' Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra—these are described as *varnas* and not *jatis* On a simple rendering this Rigvedic hymn would seem to say that the social organism as a whole was made out of a combination of *varnas* having four specific qualities and being associated with different types of action The differences among the *varnas* are due to differences in the proportions of the three qualities or *gunas* of *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (valour) and *tamas* (darkness) The division into *varnas* is not confined to human society, it is widely known that even lands or temples are classified into Brahmin, Kshatriya and so on

In effect we may regard the *varna* system as a particular method for dividing into classes various kinds of phenomena, beginning with human society Whenever in ancient India men came in contact with different communities, they tried to find a place for them in one or another *varna* according to their qualities and actions But when the habitual practices of a particular community do not correspond exactly to those of any of the four *varnas* and they appear to be endowed with a mixture of qualities to which *varna* should they be assigned? This problem exercised a variety of *smriti* writers such as Manu, Yagnyavalkya and Gautama Among these, the *Manusmriti* gives clear recommendations

I indicate the names of the begetters of all the well known castes of mixed origin Apart from these, the other castes, whose origins are partly concealed and partly revealed, are to be known by their actions (10 40)

Those outside the *varnas*, born from the mixture of *varnas*, whose particulars are not known and who are for the time being recognized as Aryas but are non Aryas—men who are thus, determine their caste by looking into their actions (10 57)

Persons of base origin acquire the nature of their father or of their mother or of both, and can by no means keep their low origin concealed (10 59)

If a person of noble origin have some fault in his birth be it in small or large measure, he will imitate the nature of his father (10 60)

Among the learned some commend the seed¹, some commend the soil², some commend both seed and soil—in such matters of doubt, the following procedure is commended (10 70)

Seeds sown on barren land are wasted without any kind of germination and where the seed is not sown even the fertile land remains fruitless. By this reasoning the good seed and the good soil are both commended (10 71)

It was solely through the influence of the seed that Rishya stringa and the other sages who were born of subhuman beings earned praise and adoration from all by their learning of the scriptures and the sciences. For this reason good seed is forever praised (10 72)

Brahma has decreed this in detail that the Shudra who follows the actions and institutions of the twice-born and the twice born who follows the actions and institutions of the Shudra — these are in relation to each other neither equal nor unequal (10 73)

If we read the Manusamhita we see further that each caste has a specified occupation. The authors of the smritis considered the nature of these occupations and on that basis decided which caste should be included in which varna and what kind of status each could claim in society. Just as in grammar words can be broken down into their components, the authors of the smritis tried in like manner to break down specific castes into the components from which they might have originated. Given below are some examples of this

The following Kshatriyas, by failing to perform the sacred thread and other rites and to engage in sacrifice and study, have gradually acquired the status of Shudra (10 43)

'Poundra', 'Oudra', 'Dravida', 'Kamboja', 'Yavana', 'Shaka', 'Parada', 'Pahnava', 'China', 'Kirata', 'Darada' and 'Khasba' the Kshatriyas originating in these countries have, by their faulty action acquired the status of Sbudra (10 44)

Those among the Brahmin and other varnas who, because of ritual lapses, are regarded as exterior castes—whether they speak Aryan or non Aryan languages—are characterised as 'Dasyus' (10 45)

The issue of the twice born through hypergamous unions are named 'Apashada' and their issue through hypogamous unions are named 'Apadhvamsaja', these castes live by work which is forbidden to all the twice born (10 46)

The occupation of the Suta caste is chariooting, the occupation of the Amhashtha is medicine, the occupation of the Vaidehī caste is to guard the inner chambers, and the occupation of the Magadha caste is to trade on land and water. (10 47)

The occupation of the Nishada caste is that of fishermen, of the Ayogava, carpentry, and Meda, Chanchu, Andhra and Madgu — of these four castes the occupation is to hunt the beasts of the forest (10 48)

Ksbatra, Ugra and Pukkasa — the occupation of these three castes is to kill or capture lizards and other creatures of the marshes, leatherwork is the occupation of the Dhugvan caste, and the occupation of the Bena caste is to play the cymbals and drums (10 49)

All these castes living by their particular occupations, reside near the trees of the cemetery, close to the mountains, in cremation grounds or in groves (10 50)

The residence of the Chandala and Shvapachn castes will be outside the village, and they are to be deprived of their vessels, their only wealth is the fowl and the ass. It is prescribed that they should wear the garments of the dead, eat from broken pots, wear iron ornaments, and not live at one place but always journey from place to place (10 51, 52)

When the virtuous are engaged in ceremonies and activities, it is forbidden to see them, their marriage rites will be performed within their own community, and they shall borrow and lend not with the well born but among themselves (10 53)

If food has to be given to them, the well born shall give it through their servants and in broken pots, and it is totally forbidden for them to travel by night in the towns and villages (10 54)

Marked by the symbols fixed for them by the king they will roam here and there during the day in the pursuit of their allotted work, and they will carry away from the village the corpses of the kinless (10 55)

They will execute those who are given the death sentence by royal decree, and the dress ornaments and beds of the executed will be their due (10 56)

The child begotten by the Brahmin in the womb of his Vaishya wife is designated as ' Nishada ' or ' Parshava ' . (10 8)

The child begotten by the Kshatriya in the womb of a Shudra woman is named ' Ugra ' and, following the nature of the parents, is harsh in spirit and action (10 9)

Conclusion

Hindu society has been built up over the ages by the integration of various communities. In course of time various improvements have taken place in agriculture and in the crafts. Perhaps in every country each community adopts a particular occupation according to local needs. When a caste or a group of clans adopted a particular occupation, the regulators of Brahminical society determined that the group should have a hereditary right over that occupation.

In Brahminical culture certain qualities were evaluated as high and others as low. The fowl and the pig were base animals, the Fishermen and the Donkey breeders were low castes, but the cattle breeder and the Horse breeder were pure. The leather worker was impure, silken garments were pure, but cotton garments were relatively less pure. Why certain specific occupations were regarded as pure and others as impure is not our present subject of discussion. At the moment we have merely to note that the social status of the different castes was determined by the yardstick of purity and impurity. Among the degraded castes, some were regarded as untouchable and some even as unseeable.

Hindu society was built up in this way by the integration of numerous such castes held in high and low esteem. But every caste was given a place in one or another of the four basic varnas, because there was no place in human society for a fifth varna over and above the four.

We can see further that there was a tendency in each lower order caste to imitate the rites and customs of the higher order castes. Who does not crave to be honoured by those who are held in honour? And for this the easiest device is clearly to imitate those held in honour. As a result of these efforts, through change of custom or, according to circumstances, through change of occupation, new subcastes emerge within the same caste. Eventually, when it limits the ties of marriage to its own confines, such a sub-caste becomes a separate caste.

If we bring together the scientific insights into the divisions in Hindu society and the rules by which the authors of the shastras sought to govern it, we will be able to gradually build up in our minds an integrated picture of Hindu society. Let us now leave the forest ways of the shastras and cast our glance in a different direction.

Notes

- 1 The qualities of the father
- 2 The qualities of the mother

The Nature of Aryan Culture in India

The Holi Festival

IN SPRING a festival called *holi* or *holaka* is celebrated throughout North India. In Bengal the festival starts with a ceremony known as *chanchar* on the fourteenth day of the light half of spring. In some places *chanchar* is described as the burning of the ram or of the old woman's hut. Something like a miniature hut is made with straw and bamboo, the figure of a sheep or of a human being made from powdered rice is kept in it, and, after worshipping Vishnu in the prescribed manner, the hut is set on fire. In Orissa, however, there is a practice of burning a live sheep instead of a lay figure. Although this practice prevails in the state of Keonjhar, in the Jagannath temple at Puri, the sheep, instead of being burnt, is released after being touched with the fire. In Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, a human being is made to leap across the flames. In Gorakhpur district on the occasion of *holi* a monkey is killed and placed somewhere on the village boundary. In Uttar Pradesh, at certain places, flowers and perfumes are applied on the body, then rubbed off and put into the fire, along with these a piece of bread, equal in length to the height of the person, is supposed to be burnt. In Bihar there is no connection between the fire and human or animal figures. There, instead of on the fourteenth night, the fire is lit on the night of the full moon with firewood which the boys collect by pilferage. It is customary to make offerings of germinated grams, linseed, areca nuts, coconuts and cakes to the fire.

times he would be polluted by this. Even though in Bihar the *holaka* is usually set on fire by a Brahmin or an elder of the village, in Bhagalpur district people from only the Dom caste have this right. As in Bengal, here also the Doms are regarded as untouchable.

If we enquire whether there are any festivals corresponding to *holaka* among the forest tribes of India we will come up with some significant facts. Among the Kandhs of southern Orissa there was a practice of human sacrifice known as *meria*. For about a hundred years now the Kandhs have under compulsion replaced the human being by a buffalo for their sacrifice. It was the practice to cut up a human being into pieces and to bury the flesh in the fields in order to enhance the productive capacity of the land. In some villages he was slowly burnt and the ashes were mingled with the soil or the stream which was used for irrigating the fields. The day after the human sacrifice, the victim's head, the rest of his body and his charred remains were collected together and burnt along with a live sheep. The ashes were then scattered on the fields or mixed with water and used for plastering the house or granary in the belief that the grain would be thus protected.

Among the Kandhs the *meria* sacrifice was an occasion for unlimited consumption of liquor and unrestrained sexual congress. The Kandhs believe that the vital energy which the Mother Earth gives us in the form of grains, we can return to her in the form of a human sacrifice. A ceremony for augmenting the fertility of the land would naturally be used as an occasion for unlimited sexual activity among human beings.

The resemblance of the institution prevalent among the Kandhs to *holi* cannot be accidental. Perhaps there was a time when human sacrifices were offered for augmenting the fertility of the land throughout North and Central India. Later this became transformed or attenuated through the spread of the Brahminical or Aryan rites and customs, remaining relatively unchanged only among forest tribes like the Kandhs. Among the Hindus, at places men have to leap through the fire, and at others, human figures made from rice powder are consigned to the flames. At places a live sheep is burnt, and at others, only its effigy. In many places we notice the attempt to improve the quality of the grain or of the soil on which it grows by scattering the ashes from the fire.

Just as human sacrifice has been replaced by a lesser offering, so also the earlier unmitigated sexual activity has been replaced by erotic gestures and songs or by a certain amount of banter.

If we analyse the social rites of the different Hindu castes we will find numerous examples of this nature. There are places where the worship of some ancient village deity is still in the hands of a caste with low ritual status while all the upper castes have acknowledged the right of the non Aryan to act as a priest in the worship of this deity. In Cuttack district the priest of the Baideshwar and Ramnath Mahadevi temple near Banki is a man of the ritually low² Mali caste. In the Jagannath temple at Puri the right to do all work connected with the idol is vested in a group descended in the female line from the Savara tribe. If we analyse the rites known as *stri-achar*³ which are found among many Hindu castes we will realise that the customs prevalent before the institution of Brahminism are still preserved in the form of *stri-achar*. These rites and customs are accorded the status of local customs (*deshachar*) and folk customs (*lokachar*) by the Brahmin priests. When the various castes began to constitute the wider Hindu society after accepting the pre eminence of the Brahmins, their rites and customs were not needlessly destroyed. Only, if there were any ceremonies and observances which violated the Brahminical code, these were refuted and rectified. Islam, Christianity and Judaism are, however, different in this matter. If anybody is initiated into these from another religion, he has to abandon practically all his past practices. But because of the tolerant spirit of Hindu religion, the different communities which enter into the fold of Hindu society do not have to make this kind of sacrifice. Even after finding a place in Brahminical society, many people have retained in a virtually unimpaired condition their earlier dance, music and social observances and institutions.

The sages who were at the pinnacle of Brahminical society acknowledged that the minds of all human beings were not on the same level. Therefore they do not all need to take recourse to the same forms to achieve self-expression. Since the same society has men of different levels their religion should also be such as to have a place for various paths and creeds. Consequently just as Hindu society has been built out of the association

of different communities, Hindu religion has also been enlarged and nourished by the union of various paths and creeds. Just as in Hindu society, among all the castes the place of the twice born is highest and among the twice born the Brahmins are at the top, so also in Hindu religion, even though the cultures of various communities have found a place, the Vedic modes of thought and action have been given the place at the top. Even though many gods have found a place in Hinduism, just as the river's course leads in the end to the sea, here also the worship of all deities terminates ultimately in the realization of the supreme Brahma.

This idea has been very lucidly put forward in the Bhagavad Gita. Lord Shri Krishna says—

Those who, as devotees of other gods, show reverence or devotion, O son of Kunti, they too worship me alone, though in unprescribed ways. Here unprescribed signifies ignorance, or, in other words, they worship me in ignorance (9.23).

Why has it been said that their sacrifices are made without awareness? The answer is that this is so for I am the recipient and the Lord of all the sacrifices prescribed in the Vedas and the Shastras. In my godly form I am the receiver of sacrifices, in the 'adhisagnobahamebatra' verse this only has been said that I am the creator and master of sacrifices. For I am the Lord of sacrifices. The devotees of other gods cannot truly know me, for this reason, though they worship, without awareness they are denied the full fruits of their worship (9.24).

Those who have devotion, but worship other gods in unprescribed ways, the fruits of even their worship are assured. Why (is it so? It is being said that)— the 'devavrata', those who seek vows to please the *devas*, or, those who are devotees of the *devas*, they are called, 'devavrata', those who are *devavrata*, they are received by (their own) *devas*. Those who are 'pitrvratas' who perform obsequies for their fathers, they are received by their fathers. In this manner, those who worship the spirits (or) *vinayaka*, the eight female spirits, the sixty four *yoginis* and others, they too are received by the spirits. But those who worship me, they are received by me. These only are called 'Vaishnava' (The effort in my worship is even like the effort in the worship of the other gods). Though the effort be the

same, they fail to worship me through lack of knowledge; hence the fruits they receive are small (9 25)

Not only will my devotees receive eternal fruits for ever, but my worship also is very easy (This is being said) He who offers me a leaf, a flower, a fruit, a drop of sacred water (and such objects, whatever be their nature) with devotion, these 'bhaktiyupihriti' (objects) offered with devotion by the 'prajatma' or one with clear devotion, I absorb or accept (9 26)

This being so, whatever you do (or), whatever you eat of your own, whatever *shrauta* or *smarta* fire offerings you make, whatever rice, ghi and other gifts you make to the Brahmins, and whatever austerities you practise, offer these (all) to me (9 27)

Hear what will befall you while doing such work. Those who are bound by good and evil actions (or) beneficial and harmful actions receive good and evil returns. Good and evil returns indicate no more than *Karma*. This *Karma* remains even as bonds, and if in this way your actions are offered to me, you will attain release from the fruits of good and evil action or the bonds of *Karma*. This is that *sannyasa* *yoga*, or, in other words, it is union (*yoga*) even while being renunciation (*sannyasa*), for its true nature is realised by offering all its fruits to me. He whose 'atma' is bound is called "sannyasayogayuktatma," and, being released from the bonds of *Karma* even in your living state, when this body is discarded, you will be received in me (9 28)

Notes

1 The more commonly used Bengal term for *holi*

2 *Ajachal* *jar* a caste from whose members water is not accepted by the Brahmins see Note 2, Chapter 4

3 Literally rites of the women or performed by the women

The Nature of India

The King's Duties

THE GOVERNANCE of the complex caste-based Hindu society, which grew up in course of time by the amalgamation of different castes or the gradual improvement of craft and other practices, was from the very beginning vested in the hands of the king. In the Mahabharata, Bhishma says the following words in advice to Yudishthira

O king! It is the duty of the excellent and righteous Kshatriyas to keep all the people under their control, because it is said in the Vedas that the rules of conduct for the three *varnas* of Brahmin, Vaishya and Shudra all derive from the rules of the state¹

Great king! Even as the footprints of the smaller animals disappear under the elephant's, so should you know that all rules of conduct are merged in the rules of the state. If the kings be deprived of the rules of governance, the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva is sunk like a boat without its pilot, hence all rules of conduct perish

O son of Pandu! The *laukik*, *vaidik*, *chaturasramya*, and the ascetic's rules of conduct all derive from the rules of the state. O descendant of Bharata! All deeds come under the purview of the Kshatriya's duties, hence when these duties are disturbed, all living things become unblest

Books were composed in ancient India on the king's rights and duties. Among these the normative texts of Brihaspati, Kautilya, Shukracharya and other writers have been partially recovered

I extract portions from what is written in the *Shukraniti* about the king's duties in the governance of society

The rules which have been prescribed for the particular castes and which have always been followed by the ancestors, these should govern the castes in question. Else they shall be liable to punishment by the king

(The king) shall protect the artisans and craftsmen in his kingdom in the pursuit of their work. (When their numbers) exceed the requirements he shall engage them in tillage or service

Every day, after investigating the causes while keeping in view the place and the *shastras* and determining the particular rules of the caste, locality, class and lineage, the king shall pursue his own rule (meting justice to his subjects) in accordance with these. People shall be judged in accordance with their own rules of conduct, or else the subjects will be distressed. In the South, the twice born marry the daughters of their mother's brother

In the Central regions, the artisans and craftsmen eat (poison or beef?), and all eat (fish or meat?), the women are promiscuous

In the Northern regions the women drink liquor, the men have contact with women in their periods, the Khasas accept the brother's widow after the brother's death

For the above-mentioned acts they are not liable to penance or punishment. Those who perform acts which have been traditionally performed or were instituted by the ancestors are not corrupted by their acts

About the king's judgement, it has also been said that when a dispute is brought before him he should adjudicate in accordance with the rules of the section* in question

Cultivators, artisans, craftsmen, usurers, dancers, *sannyasis*, thieves — these shall be judged by the rules of their section.

When a ruling is beyond the capacities of the members of the lineage, it shall be taken up by members of the section. When members of the section fail, it shall go to the court of the people. If they also fail, the decision shall be made by a person appointed by the king

When we read the passages extracted from the *Mahabharata* and the *Shukraniti* we realise that the king or his principle of

governance was regarded as the backbone of society. Under this principle of governance the various communities followed their own rules of conduct and their trade and folk practices. The king, without harassment to his people, maintained these very rules and practices.

But what was the ideal for the economic organization of the country? There is always a gap between the ideal and the reality. But in order to understand the reality we must also try to understand as far as possible the ideal according to which a society seeks to constitute itself. No doubt the ideal changes in course of time. But the rural areas of India have for many centuries been under the influence of a particular ideal. By describing it we will in due course examine the development of this ideal. Here we will give only a broad description of it.

Production and Distribution In the Village

We must again set aside the classical texts and examine the arrangements that prevailed in the villages for production and distribution. The economic system which prevailed in village India from very ancient times till the inception of British rule has been almost completely upset. Nevertheless by piecing together its scattered remnants we might to some extent be able to reconstruct its shape as a whole.

In 1875 a government servant named Nandakishore Das presented a very valuable report to the government after investigating into land rights in Puri district. As a result of his investigations we see that prior to Muslim rule i.e. during Hindu rule the king enjoyed the right of ownership over the land and the subjects had only the right of use. He observed in Puri district the arrangements described below.

There was still some evidence of the presence of service tenures throughout the district (1) Six hundred and five Carpenters were granted 396 acre of land they had to make (and repair) for the village cultivators all wooden implements necessary for tillage (2) Five hundred and sixty nine Blacksmiths enjoyed 366 acres of land for similar work (3) Thirty one Potters enjoyed the use of 25 acres of land in return for providing cooking pots to the village landlords and the soldiers passing through the village (4) One thousand and forty one Washermen enjoyed 663 5 acres of land for washing the clothes of the landlords and

the peasants (5) The Astrologer Brahmins are required to determine the auspicious times for sowing or for marriage and other ceremonies For 375 such Astrologers there were 133 acres of land. (6) The work of the Barber is to engage in tonsorial and certain other services during marriage and other ceremonies For 990 of them there were 726 acres of land (7) For ferrying people across the river there were 54 Boatmen, they were allotted 64 5 acres of land (8) For guarding the forest near Khordha a man was allotted two acres of land (9) For keeping the village streets clean and for other work seventeen Sweepers were granted 11 acres of land (10) Thirteen Bauris enjoyed 5 5 acres of land for serving in the house of the landlord (11) For providing music in the landlord's kacheri on festive occasions twenty-five musicians were granted 18 acres of land (12) Four Dining-women were allotted one acre of land for performing dance and music before the idols (13) Three Gardeners were allotted 29 poles of land for providing flowers at marriages and on other ceremonial occasions (14) For drawing the chariot of Jagannath three persons were allowed to enjoy 9 75 acres of land (15) One person was granted 19 poles of land for tending the village cattle (16) Two acres of land were allotted to two persons belonging to a lower order of Brahmins known as Madhya Brahmins for attending to certain ceremonies

The practice of maintaining village servants for taking care of all the crafts and services required in the village prevailed not only in Orissa but throughout India All householders made separate annual contributions for the maintenance of those who served them At some places their maintenance was provided for in the form of grains, and at others, as in Puri district, in the form of cultivable land, and each sought to remain in his allotted office from generation to generation

Yeotmal district is located in Maharashtra on the south side of Wardha There in every village the members of the different castes are paid according to the rates given below for rendering their hereditary services This payment is known as *baluta*, in other parts of Vidarbha it is known as *hak* Those who render services include artisans, religious functionaries, cowherds sweepers etc Every village does not have every type of functionary, but Blacksmiths, Carpenters, Washermen, Barbers and Sweepers or

Watchmen are present in almost all villages. The Blacksmith gets annually between 32 and 65 seers of *jowar* for every set of plough and plough cattle, each set can till between 16 and 20 acres of land. The Carpenter gets a similar amount. The Barber gets between 25 and 40 seers, the Washerman between 13 and 16, and the Watchman between 25 and 32 seers. The amounts which functionaries of the lower ranks receive are enough to give them a bare subsistence, whereas what the artisans or the priests receive is sufficient to enable them to live in modest comfort.

We learn from the Report presented in 1812 to the Parliament in England on conditions in India that even at that time the following functionaries were maintained in the villages of Madras Presidency.

(1) Village headman, (2) Accountant, (3) Watchman, (4) Supervisor of the boundaries, (5) Supervisor of the tanks and of the water supply, (6) Priest, (7) School-teacher, (8) Astrologer, (9) Blacksmith, (10) Carpenter, (11) Potter, (12) Washerman, (13) Barber, (14) Cowherd, (15) Physician, (16) Dancing-girl, (17) Musician and poet.

In the Gujarat district of the Punjab there are arrangements for payments in grain to the various functionaries. The amount of wheat or barley stalks that can be tied by a rope measuring three lengths of straw is reckoned as one bundle. Several such bundles are set apart for each. The village Blacksmith repairs sickles, spades and ploughshares for everyone and gets a prescribed payment. The householder has to provide the iron, the Blacksmith himself procures the charcoal. But when a householder gets one of his trees felled, the Blacksmith is entitled to its trunk and branches. If a newcomer from outside the village wishes to get work done by the Blacksmith, he has to supply iron and coal, and pay a wage as well as the price for all necessary items.

Investigations in a village named Dhebarua in Basti district in Uttar Pradesh have shown that paddy or wheat weighing four *paseris* has to be given per plough to the Barber, the Washerman, the Blacksmith, the Carpenter and the Cowherd. Aside from this, everyone gets something as 'Kalyani' after the threshing. In addition to the functionaries mentioned above, the village Astrologer, the Kahar and the Sokha (or exorcist) also get something. These dues are met before the grain is divided between the land owner and the sharecropper. In addition, a certain portion

measuring five times the amount that can be put into the end of one's cloth by holding it with both hands is set apart for any Brahmin or mendicant who may be visiting the village. The sharecropper's wife is also allowed to pick up as much as she can hold before the final division is made between the landowner and the sharecropper.

Such arrangements are still prevalent in the Garbeta region of Midnapore district. The Barber gets from the householder one man or four seers of paddy per head he has to give everyone his haircut and shave throughout the year. The Blacksmith gets ten to twelve mans of paddy for every plough. He has to repair the sickles and the spades but if he has to make something new he will have to be paid a separate wage. The dues of the Carpenter or the Washerman are not fixed they get wages according to their work. The Physician takes between 45 and 60 seers of paddy per household. No separate price is generally charged for the medicine. But in the case of a difficult illness a special agreement may be made. For instance a payment of five rupees is agreed upon for the cure of a rheumatic patient in such a case he will provide the medicine without charging a separate fee.

Fairs

Those who lived in village India met their requirements through such arrangements by binding artisans and functionaries to the community throughout the country from generation to generation. But there are certain things which are not of daily requirement and for which it is not possible to tie the artisan down to the village. Take for instance brass or bell metal utensils. These one does not require to purchase or repair every day and it is not possible for a small village to maintain Bellmetal workers for itself. In these circumstances two or three kinds of arrangements may be made. In the different districts of West Bengal the Bellmetal workers move from village to village repairing broken utensils or if these are totally unserviceable exchanging them for new ones after making a certain charge on the householder. In some cases the Bellmetal worker may remain for a time in a particular village he may even make a vessel for measuring paddy by melting down the brass in some old utensils. But there is a better arrangement for buying and selling that prevails throughout India even today.

In an agricultural country one does not have heavy work on the land all through the year. When the harvest is over and the cultivator has some money in hand, fairs are set up in various villages. Throughout the length and breadth of India there is the custom of setting up fairs at different places on the occasion of the worship of some deity or the other. At some places many people get together to bathe at the confluence of two rivers on a certain auspicious day. At many such fairs, if not at all, there is much buying and selling. The practice of the sale and purchase of particular items at particular fairs has prevailed from ancient times, as a result of which the householder can plan to procure from these fairs the various things he requires. It is not as if he goes to the fair merely for some enjoyment after a hard year's work, he also uses the occasion for attending to his material requirements.

The fair at Kalisunri in the Bauphal *thana* of Barisal district attracts many people not only from this district but also from the neighbouring district of Khulna, Jessore, etc. Horses, cows and buffaloes are brought to the fair in large numbers, in addition, about ten thousand boats in various shapes and sizes are brought for sale. The builders of these boats are Carpenters from Dacca, some of them might bring as many as two hundred boats tied together along the waterways. All through the year they build boats to sell at this fair, and at the Kalisunri fair they sell them to people from many districts. Similarly, at the Nekmarda fair in Dinajpur district and at the Kali fair at Jaiganj on the other side of Thakurgaon, a large number of horses, dogs, elephants, sheep, cattle and camels are brought for sale. At a large fair such as this numerous buyers come even from Dacca, Mymensingh, Dhuhri and other districts.

In Almora district in the Himalayas there is a temple of Bageshwar Mahadev at the confluence of the rivers Sarayu and Gomti. Every year about twenty thousand people congregate there to bathe on the occasion of the winter solstice. Apart from the Kumaonese and the Bhotiyas, many people come there from the plains of Uttar Pradesh. The mountain dwelling Bhotiyas come to sell at the Bageshwar fair the blankets, shawls, carpets etc. which they make all through the year in their little villages. They are able to rear sheep, goats and horses on the grass that grows along the slopes of the mountains where they live. These horses are very

suitable for carrying goods along the mountain tracks, so at the Bageshwar fair, mountain animals are also sold in some number. In addition to blankets, and sheep and goats, the Bhotiyas also bring for sale articles procured from Tibet such as musk, skins of various animals, saltpetre, wax, Tibetan medicines etc., and one can even buy utensils and Tibetan woodwork from them. People from the Dinpur region bring various kinds of baskets, boxes, chests as well as leather, iron, copper and earthen utensils to the fair at Bageshwar. The Almora traders in their turn bring the following objects to sell to the mountain people cotton cloth, umbrellas, oil, salt, sugar, jiggery, cereals, soap, mirrors, buttons, handkerchiefs, watches, flutes, cards, rubber or tortoise-shell toys, tin and aluminium utensils, torches, etc. A large part of the money earned by the mountain-dwelling men and women from the sale of their produce is wasted on these cheap luxuries.

Since the Bageshwar fair is held on the mountain slopes, it can accommodate only ten or twenty thousand people, but many more people assemble at several places in India where similar fairs are held. We give brief accounts of a few such fairs. Seven miles from Ajmere in Rajputana is the pilgrim centre of Pushkar where in early winter countless horses are brought for sale from all over Rajputana, and purchasers come together from all the provinces of India. In a village named Abani in the Kolar district of Karnataka state the fair of the Ramalingeshwar temple lasts for almost ten days in the month of Phalgun, at least twenty thousand heads of cattle are sold there. The Kundapur fair near Badanera in the Amaravati district of Maharashtra lasts for almost a full winter month, and at least sixty thousand people assemble there. All kinds of things are bought and sold on the occasion. At the fairs at Bhittake village and at Umbanguada, six and thirty miles respectively from Badanera, as at Kundapur, apart from cattle, iron goods, bullock carts, brass and bell-metal utensils and toys for children are sold.

The Bateshwar Mahadeva fair on the banks of the Yamuna some forty miles from Agra starts around the beginning of November and lasts for almost a month, around a hundred thousand people assemble there. Numerous horses, camels, cattle, buffaloes, elephants and bullock carts are brought to the fair for sale. The fair which is held at a place called Bhudwana, a little to the north

west of Delhi is famous for the sale of cattle belonging to the Haryonna stock. In the Rohtak district of the Punjab¹ there is a similar fair at which at least fifty thousand heads of cattle are sold. At least four to five hundred thousand people come to the fair held in the month of Kartik in a village called Kakora in Budayun district in Uttar Pradesh. At the fair vast quantities of furniture, clothing, utensils and footwear are sold, there are separate stalls for the sale of each type of item. At a fair in the Kotapakonda mountain in Guntur district in Madras¹ held in the month of Magh about sixty thousand people come. Close by are the Thallamalai mountains, and from there bamboo and wooden logs are brought in large quantities to the fair for sale. At least sixty thousand people come to the fair held in the month of Jaishtha at the mausoleum of Zohrabibi in Rudauli which is between Lucknow and Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh, in addition to articles of wear, various kinds of grains are sold there.

Pilgrim Centres

The coming together of people in large numbers transforms a fair into a small township. When trade and commerce go on for a long time at a centre of this kind, it becomes gradually transformed into a permanent town. There are innumerable pilgrimage centres in all the provinces of India. Just as there are pilgrimages distinctive of Vaishnavas, Shaivas, Shaktas and other sects among the Hindus, so also the Muslims have a large number of pilgrimages. The Vaishnavas have their twelve great pilgrimage centres, the Shaktas have their fifty one sacred places, and in ancient times the Saurya sect had seven famous places of worship. The distinctive feature of these pilgrimages is that they are not confined to any particular corner of India, but are dispersed through all its provinces. If someone sought to see the four holy seats², he would have to go to Joshimath near Badrikashram in the north, Shrikshetra or Puri in the east, the Sharadapeeth in Gujarat in the west and Shringeri in Kadur district in Karnataka in the south.

Further, it is also a feature of every pilgrimage that the pilgrim must bring back something or the other from it no matter how rich or poor he may be. The pilgrims to Puri or Shrikshetra buy pictures of Jagannath, figures of Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra engraved in soft stone, hellmetal utensils, saris of southern make, and so on. At Kashi or Benares one gets stone objects, costly

silken cloth, wooden toys, utensils of brass and bellmetal, etc. At Vrindavan one may acquire printed cloth and utensils. The pilgrims not only buy articles according to their means, but there are in these matters certain prescriptions regarding what should be done on a pilgrimage. Poor Hindustani⁶ pilgrims buy sticks of cane painted red for a few coppers when they come to the pilgrim centre of Puri, these they later deposit in a temple on the bank of the Yamuna at Vrindavan. Those who visit Badrikashram carry strips from its temple banners and deposit these again at a temple in Vrindavan. In other words, one has to collect articles from various centres in India in order to complete one's pilgrimage. The pilgrim gets acquainted with the different parts of the country, and the various crafts are kept alive in these centres, thanks to the pilgrims.

Almost every pilgrim centre has acquired a reputation for one or another craft. The customers a craftsman attracts by sitting in his village can never go beyond a certain number. But the craftsman or artisan whose wares are sold at a pilgrimage has buyers from all over the country. And at a pilgrim centre there is no dearth of festivals throughout the year, as a result, the craftsman or artisan at such a place does not deal with customers only at a certain time in the year as happens at a fair. Here there are fairs throughout the year, so to say, and therefore it becomes possible for many craftsmen to pursue their trade at a single place. At ancient centres such as Benares or Puri the different city wards have become famous for different crafts. At some there is stone-work, at others dyeing and printing of cloth, at yet others there is gold and silver work or work in gold and silver thread, and at others again one finds painters or craftsmen making clay dolls. Thus what we see in a temporary form at a fair, acquires a permanent character in the different pilgrim centres in India.

India's Cultural Unity

It is not as if those who flock to the pilgrim centres from the different provinces return home after merely collecting some material objects they try also to acquire religious merit through ablutions, sacrificial offerings, gifts and the performance of other religious rites under the direction of Brahmin priests at these places. Whether on the banks of the Narmada or the Godavari or the Kaveri, or at the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna or

of the Alakananda and the Bhagirathi, the Bengali pilgrim learns to regard all the pilgrim centres in India as his own by offering prayers in the same Sanskrit language and participating in the same ceremonies. Not merely on account of the king's rule, but even more through the journeys of endless pilgrims across the ages, a kind of cultural unity has gradually emerged throughout the country. The same Ramayana and Mahabharata, and the same stories from the Puranas touch the sensibilities of people throughout the Brahminically governed society. The *ashrama* or stage of *sannyasa* or renunciation is intimately associated with the Hindu religion. In the past the twice born householder, after fulfilling his worldly duties, accepted *vanaprastha*⁷ and *sannyasa*⁸ or renunciation. But probably since the days of Buddhadeva and of Shankaracharya, there developed a separate order of *sannyasis*⁹. After adopting *sannyasa* the *sannyasi* renounces all connections with his past. In other words, he renounces his name, *gotra*, home, etc., and he is initiated into the state of being homeless, nameless and *gatra* less. There is a proverb in Hindi that flowing water and the roving *sadhu* are the best. The *sadhus* and *sannyasis*, in moving from pilgrimage to pilgrimage, from village to village and across the different kingdoms, have undoubtedly contributed something to the establishment of the cultural unity of India.

A Discussion of Economic Ideals

Throughout India the responsibility for running the economic life of the village lay with the different artisan and cultivating castes. Everybody produced in accordance with the needs of the village. People met their dues by paying in cash or in grain. Everyone depended on everyone else. It has been observed that when a dispute occurred between a householder and some artisan, the other members of the village sought to bring about a settlement. Just as the freedom to change one's calling in the economic sphere was not recognized—everyone being required to follow his ancestral occupation—so on the other hand did the villagers see to it that no artisan suffered from lack of sustenance.

Keeping in view this ideal of cooperation and inter dependence in the structure of Indian society, some have expressed the opinion that there was socialism in ancient India. We need some discussion on this subject in order to clarify our views on the economic ideals governing Indian society. Further, this discussion will make

times on the basis of village agriculture and handicrafts and the protection of the rights of each in his ancestral calling, were of a kind that they enabled people to survive in spite of the many vicissitudes through which they passed over the centuries. In spite of the prevalence of inequalities between the different *jatis* and between the *varnas*, because they enjoyed the basic material securities and because they could observe without let or hindrance their family, caste and local customs, the common people did not protest against the social supremacy enjoyed by the Brahmins. Because the Brahminically governed Aryan society recognised the rights of people to their own customs, the incoming communities freely accepted the positions assigned to them in Hindu society.

There is no doubt that the Brahminically-governed society was economically better off than the society of the Kols and the Juangs. Mainly because of this attraction and because of the assurance that they would not need to alter their own customs radically, we see the Juangs, Orangos and other communities gradually abandoning their independence and moving towards Brahminical society.

For the same reason even within Hindu society the different communities could ignore the inequalities of status and of the opportunities of self-expression, and hind themselves by mutual bonds which remained intact for many centuries. Rulers have risen to the political firmament and fallen, revolt, civil strife, famine, and epidemic have overtaken the country again and again, but because the centre of gravity lay in the economic and social order of the village community and because of the regimen of the customs of family and caste, life could continue on an even keel in spite of these periodic visitations. Perhaps progress and advancement were checked by these onslaughts from outside, but they failed to push the people of India into the mire of barbarism. Because of this vitality, Indian culture — in spite of its many intercal weaknesses — has been able to remain alive in the shelter of Indian social institutions, and, unlike many historically famous civilizations, it has not altogether lost the possibility of a revival and a new awakening.

The Ancient History of Caste

THERE is much dispute about the date of composition of the Vedas. Whether the speakers of the Aryan language came to India after the Vedic culture had attained its full development or whether this development was attained within India, the material culture, social organization and cultural life of the original Aryan speakers — these are all subjects on which scholars have done research from various angles. But this is not germane to our present discussion. We will have to reconstruct as far as possible the history of the form taken during Vedic times by the economic framework in North India, the changes it underwent subsequently and the causes behind these changes. But unfortunately there is a great lack of reliable evidence here. Our efforts can at best be to attain the kind of vague idea that one might get by piecing together a few unconnected sheets from a tattered book whose pages have been scattered by the winds.

We get some evidence in the Vedic literature of conflicts between the Aryans or the 'civilized' people and the forest dwelling communities. The aboriginal inhabitants with whom the Aryans came into contact have been described as 'ghor' which means dark, they are 'noseless'. Perhaps they appeared like this because, in comparison with the cultivating and herding communities, the hunting tribes of the forest had shorter noses, i.e. noses whose breadth exceeded their length. The Aryans were afraid of these forest dwelling tribes. They would come and harass the sages in their places of sacrifice, and the sages sought the protection of the Kshatriyas, as we get to know by reading the stories in the Ramayana.

of the Vedic period. If such towns are discovered and they are excavated according to scientific principles, we may succeed in acquiring new knowledge about life in that period.

Mohenjodaro

The late Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay discovered extensive remains of the Indus civilization for the first time in a place called Mohenjodaro in the province of Sind. After many years of effort the Department of Archaeology of the Government of India has discovered and published many facts about that civilization. Scholars have not yet been able to arrive at any clear agreement in deciphering the inscriptions found in Mohenjodaro. Some broad conclusions have been reached on the age of the Indus civilization, its centre of origin and its relationship with other countries. But we are still in the dark as to whether it had any relationship with Aryan or Vedic culture and what connection it had with the Hindu society of later times. Under these circumstances it is better to exclude the Indus civilization from a discussion of the history of Hindu society. The interested reader will be able to form a broad idea of it by reading the Bengali book by Kunjabihari Goswami or the short English book by Mr Mackay.

The Age of Lord Buddha

We have given above a very rough idea of the economic system of ancient India. When we come to the succeeding period, i.e. the age of Gautama Buddha we get a more detailed picture of it. Lord Buddha declared a revolt against the ritual ridden Brahminical religion and drew the attention of the broad masses of people to the essential substance of religion. He made many observations in protest against the plea for social status by Brahmins on grounds of lineage. These were later brought together in the *Dhammapadagranthas*. Lord Buddha was constrained to say:

One does not become a Brahmin by wearing matted locks or by his clan or by his caste, but he who has perceived the four noble truths in their sixteen forms and is well versed in the new extra mundane religion be is pure and is a true Brahmin
(26/11)

O man of evil intellect ! Of what use are your matted locks and deerskin ? Your inner being is full (of anger, anxiety, etc), you are cleansing merely your external body (26/12)

I do not call him a Brahmin who is sprung from the Brahmin caste or from the womb of a Brahmin's wife, for if he is soiled by anger and other forms of filth, he will only be boastful (in others words, he will only say, " Look, gentlemen, I am a Brahmin "), but I will call (him) a Brahmin who is detached and sinless (26/14)

He who is sinless in body, mind and speech, he who is extremely restrained in these three, I call such a person a Brahmin (26/9)

He who abandons harshness and always speaks truthfully, and gives good advice, and involves nobody in fruitless matters, I call him a Brahmin (26/26)

He who is profoundly wise, meritorious, judges keenly the ways of right and wrong, and has attained the excellent state (*nirvana*), I call him a Brahmin (26/21)

He who is without enmity among enemies, is calm among those who mete punishment, is without bonds among those who are attached to the world I call him a Brahmin (26/24)

He who has pierced through greed in this world and wanders homeless, he who has made greed and the tide of wordly desires faint, I call him a Brahmin (26/34)

The man who, like the waterdrop on the lotus or like the still mustard seed on the needle's point, is uninvolved in lust and anxiety, I call him a Brahmin (26/19)

Lord Buddha protested in this way because the occupation and status of the Brahmin, instead of depending on personal character and merit, was determined by birth. There is reason to believe that in his time the different crafts also had come partially under the control of different lineages. There were separate residential areas for Nishadas, Chandalas, Brahmins and Dasyus. The caste of Chandalas was regarded as very degraded and clearing the roads of garbage and keeping watch over the village at night were reckoned as their ancestral calling. Let alone eating the food cooked by a Chandala even to touch him made a man impure. Well diggers, Potters, Leather workers and Barbers were counted among the inferior craftsmen. But we do not fully know how far

ancestral rights to the arts and crafts extended. In the *Kush jataka* there is the story of a prince who lived to succession with a potter, a florist and so on, and learnt their respective trades. It may well be that the freedom given to a prince was not enjoyed by ordinary men. Or it may be that even among people in general ancestral rights in the various occupations had not till then been very firmly established.

We get indications of something else again at the time of Lord Buddha. It is known that there was a settlement of five hundred Potters near Varanasi. In another *jataka* we are told of a settlement inhabited by a thousand Blacksmiths. There is reference to this community of Blacksmiths having a *jetthak* or *pamukkha* or, in other words, a headman or elder. These artisans or craftsmen pursued their ancestral calling and were governed by the rules of their *gana puga* or *sreni*.

India's Advance in Crafts and Commerce

The arrangements for the production and distribution of wealth that evolved in the shelter of villages, fairs, towns, and pilgrimage centres and on the basis of the monopoly enjoyed over the various arts and crafts by the different lineages or castes, enabled India to become quite prosperous in comparison to the other countries of the time. Today Britain, Germany and America lead in the field of industry, similarly, in ancient times India and China enjoyed the leading position among the countries of the world.

What was produced by this advanced system of handicrafts was in part exported to other countries. In ancient historical descriptions we find India being linked by ties of commerce with Java, Annam and China on the one side, and, on the other, with Babylon and the Roman empire. One finds inscriptions in the Greek, Brahmi and Kharoshthi scripts on the coins issued by Kanishka in the second century A.D. This was done no doubt in order to ensure the circulation of these coins in countries other than India, outside of Kanishka's empire. From the book, *Periples of the Erythrean Seas*, we learn that various kinds of spices, cloth, ivory, pearls, etc. were exported to Western countries from the different ports of India. Very fine cotton cloth was also exported from the region around the banks of the Ganga. In return for these, India imported from outside, liquor, copper, tin, lead, unalloyed gold,

silver coins, and even beautiful maidens and boys trained in music. *Periples* was written around the first century A.D.

We can easily infer that the progress of commerce and industry in India, of which we get such proof, was leading to various changes within Indian society. Many inscriptions from the first to the sixth centuries A.D. have been discovered in various places. If we read the inscriptions from Nasik, Junnar, Basar, Indore, Mandasore and the temple at Bhittaswami, we learn that among the different communities of traders and artisans there emerged various associations known as *puga*, *gana*, *sreni* etc., and that people pursuing a particular occupation sought to act co-operatively under the regulation of these associations. We can enumerate some of the occupations which had developed associations of this kind—grain traders, moneylenders, oilmen, astrologers, priests, singers, warriors, gardeners, florists, etc.

In the Buddhist period itself we notice yet another thing. Those engaged in commerce accumulated large quantities of wealth through internal and external trade. There were huge stores of grain in their homes, and they themselves traded in the objects which they got manufactured by families of craftsmen, making large profits thereby. The merchants were generally understood to be the wealthiest people in the towns and they succeeded in extending considerable influence over the king and even over the government of the state. In course of time India became weighed down by the burden of the gold imported from outside and the merchandise produced within. Because in spite of the abundance of wealth, the evil of an unequal system of distribution led to famines at places, and the wealthy even while accepting the ideals of charity, were not able to save the country from the disease of inequality. The condition of the Chandalas and of the so-called lower strata was never such as to allow them the full expression of their human quality.

Ideals of Life among Citizens

We have no need to discuss the forms taken by the ideals of enjoyment among the ordinary residents of towns and cities at that time. In the corpus of the ancient literature it is the *Dharma shastras* and the *Puranas* that have attracted our attention the most. The period that I am speaking of was one in which various *Puranas* had been written or were being written for the

purpose of spreading the higher truths of Indian philosophy among the populace Education and culture were an doubt spreading by word of mouth, but we also have to examine closely how at the same time the temptations and ideals of enjoyment were weakening the country by introducing a certain looseness in the character of the contented householder, and were making the country incapable of countering the challenge of Muslim civilization in the succeeding period.

Professor Harachandra Chakladar has written a very valuable book called *Social Life in Ancient India*. He says that the sage Vatsyayana lived in the middle of the third century A.D. and was possibly an inhabitant of the western part of the Deccan. We get sufficient evidence of a this-worldly epicurean philosophy of life at the time when the *Kamasutra* was compiled. In the first chapter of the *Kamasutra*, Vatsyayana mentioned this kind of viewpoint and, by demolishing it, sought to establish religion in its place of honour.

There is no need to follow the ways of religion, because its fruits cannot be obtained in this world, and even if religious sacrifices are performed, it is to be doubted whether they will bring any fruits.

It is preferable to possess a pigeon today than to possess a peacock tomorrow.

A brass cup that one is certain to obtain is better than a golden goblet about which one is in doubt. Thus say the *Lokayatikas*².

Even though Vatsyayana demolished this viewpoint with subtle arguments, there is much to learn from the principles of worldly life and enjoyment which come out clearly in his book. The reader will have to read patiently and closely the excerpts given below³, despite their length because he will be able to form from them a realistic picture of Indian society of nearly fifteen hundred years ago.

After acquiring education and the status of a householder and with wealth acquired by the Brahmin through gifts by the Kshatriya through conquest, through commerce by the Vaishya and through service by the Shudra, or through inheritance, or through both means, you should pursue the life of a citizen.

You should reside in a town, a *pattan* (capital), a *kharbat* (collection of two hundred hamlets) or in a large settlement of honest persons; or in such a place where you can carry on your life's activities

You should make a house there. There should be water nearby. It is necessary to have a garden-house on the side where there is water. The rooms should be divided according to the functions of the household. You should make, or have made, two apartments

In the outer apartment too there should be two very beautiful bolsters and a bed covered with a pure white sheet. Close to that there should be another, slightly smaller bed. On the side where the head is, a bracket should be set up, and on the opposite side there should be a table. On it there should be, for one's enjoyment at night, unguents, garlands, a box decorated with wax, a box containing bottles and jars for perfumes, the skins of pomegranates and lemons, and betel leaves. On the floor there should be a spittoon, a *veena* hung on an elephant tusk, a drawing board, brushes and paints, books of any kind, garlands of yellow arraranth, by the side of the bed, on the floor there should be chairs, dice boards, just outside there should be cages for tame birds, in a quiet corner you should have provisions for making woodcarvings and other pastimes. In the gardenhouse there should be a swing covered with cloth decorated with various designs. In that house itself there should be a portico overhung with perfumed creepers where seats should be provided. You should thus arrange in an orderly way the various necessary objects in your house

The lover should rise in the morning and perform his daily routine acts. Later, after cleansing your teeth and applying unguents, taking a garland, applying the red dye *alaktika* on the lips, taking betel leaves rubbing the lips with a compound of red dye and wax, observing your face in the mirror, freshening your breath, and taking the betel box, you should begin your round of work

To bathe every day, every second day to anoint the body with oil, sandalwood paste, etc., every third day to rub the body with a foamy substance, every fourth day to shave the head and face, and every fifth or tenth day the entire body,

together with bathing and the various cleansing acts. Cleansing oneself of perspiration to be done always in a closed room. To eat in the forenoon and in the afternoon. According to Charayana, eating is obligatory in the forenoon and in the evening. After the morning meal, to teach the parrots to talk, to watch the fight of partridges, cocks and rams, to participate in various entertainments with the *pithamardas* and the *vita vidushakas*, and then to have a siesta. After arising from the siesta, to do one's hair and, in the appropriate dress, to promenade in the *goshthi*, *sabha* or *samiti*. Later in the evening, music, after music, when the outer apartment has been decorated with flowers and perfumed with incense to await, along with one's companions, the beloved's arrival in the bed chamber. If she fails to arrive, send a woman messenger. If she does not come out of pique, go yourself. When she comes engage in pleasant conversation and exchanges with the companions. When, during bad weather, the beloved's dress is spoilt in the rain, have her dressed as she had been. Or have her attended to by a servant. This can be done at all times.

Make arrangements also for excursions, assemblies in the *goshthi*, drinking parties, and games of skill. On an appointed day, once or twice a month, gather together at the temple of Saraswati. The visiting artists, and dancers shall be made to display their dance music and arts. On the next day the artists and dancers will receive appreciation and prizes from them. After that, if they have won respect, witness their dance, etc., otherwise give them leave. There should be a spirit of co-operation on occasions of illness, grief or mourning as well as on festive occasions. Those visitors who come together at that place, help them on occasions of grief and of festivity with various services. This is the prescribed duty of the *gana*. Here is also described and explained the arrangements to be made on pilgrimages associated with various deities.

What the assembly of a *goshthi* is, is explained.

A *goshthi* is the name of a gathering of men of the same intelligence, education, disposition, wealth and age who sit together for social interchange in the house of a courtesan, or in an assembly, or in the house of a leading citizen along with courtesans. There they are occupied in the pursuit of poetry or some

other art. At these *goshthi*s, the townsmen should offer worship to the captivating arts, and, as a token of love, they should offer their serving maids for what may be required of them.

Visiting each other at home is enjoined.

There various forms of sweet, savoury, bitter, harsh and sour beverages should be offered to the courtesans, and should then be consumed. Thus the nature of excursions in parks is explained.

There are some special features of excursions in parks which are explained.

In the morning itself you should attire yourselves elegantly, mount your horses, and, together with the courtesans, take your servants along. There, after enjoying the pleasures of the journey, you should have cock fights, play games of skill (such as chess), witness the performance of the dancers and, each having spent the time according to his inclination, you should return in the same way in the afternoon, bringing back tokens from the park (such as bouquets, garlands, etc.). It is also explained how in the summer you can engage in water sports in tanks, ponds and lakes which have been cleared of crocodiles and other creatures.

These pleasures may be enjoyed by a man alone with his chosen courtesans, or by courtesans in the company of various men.

Someone who has no property or children, who has only his body, and whose only possession consists of flowers, some foamy substances, some astringent substances, if such a man comes from a renowned province and is well versed in the arts, he should instruct the members of the *goshthi* in these arts and establish himself in circles with which courtesans are associated. Such a person is known as a *puthamarda*.

A man who has spent all his fortunes, but who is talented and possesses his own house and relations, who can discourse on many subjects among the courtesans and in the *goshthi* and who seeks to make a living by his association with the courtesans and citizens is called a *mitra*.

You should describe to those among your village castefolk who are keen and intelligent, the social circles of the townsmen and enthuse them to imitate their ways. Attract them to the *goshthi*. If you have the means you should provide for the

delights of the people. You should oblige them by helping them in all their works. You should help them as far as possible. This is proper for the townsman.

People will be highly esteemed in the *goshthi* if they do not speak only in Sanskrit or only in the local tongue. A *goshthi* towards which people have animosity, or one which is guided by itself alone, or one in which there is only malice and backbiting will not attract a wise person. A learned man will acquire worldly success by attaching himself to a *goshthi* where there is room for thought, entertainment and play.

Another Aspect of Society

Another evil effect of the increasing prosperity also made its appearance in ancient India. There used to be continual conflict and strife among the rulers of the different regions of the country. They were perpetually jealous about maintaining the honour of their family or community, if the king was good, he remained concerned about the welfare of his subjects, otherwise the subjects had nothing to rely upon. They tried to maintain themselves in their villages by pursuing their ancestral occupations to the extent possible, if these occupations did not give them a sufficient income, they turned to labour or cultivation. While they were adversely affected by political conflicts, these never overcame them completely.

We see another effect of the accumulation of wealth in the behaviour of the Brahmins. In earlier times the Brahmins pursued the vocation of scholars and teachers, they tried as far as possible to accept a minimum of gifts and offerings. Even what they took was spent mainly on the maintenance of their pupils. But when the wealthy in India took their place among the richest in the world and when the princely families, in competition with the wealthy, turned their attention to more and more elaborate rituals, some degeneration undoubtedly came about also among the Brahmins. At a later time when Mahmud of Ghazni sacked the temples of Somnath, Nagarkote, etc., the amount of gold and jewellery he collected at each place is probably unparalleled in the world's history. While among these Brahmins overburdened with wealth there might have been some who sought to educate the people through the *Puranas* and other works, we see in many places that a large section of them became occupied in composi-

panegyrics for the kings in highly ornate language with a view to advancing their own interests

Thus, the direct consequence of the burden of wealth in society was that Brahmins and Kshatriyas began to be diverted from the path of right conduct.

Notes

1. Various forms of association of craftsmen, artisans, etc
2. A school of materialist philosophers
3. These are from the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana

History of the Middle Ages

IN THE MIDDLE AGES India, as compared to other countries, had become quite advanced in agriculture, handicrafts and commerce, and it was partly on account of this that Pathans, Turks, Moghuls and other followers of the Islamic faith from Afghanistan, Central Asia, etc began to come repeatedly to India for plunder. We do not observe any consolidated effort within India to meet these attacks from outside. Wherever some little effort was made, it was not sufficient to overcome the military skills of the Muslim nations. Gradually Muslim chieftains acquired the royal seat in North India, and within a few centuries the area from the Punjab to Gaur¹ came under their rule.

But it is not our purpose to discuss the changes in India's political fortunes. We would like to investigate only the changes brought about in the economic arrangements in Indian society and in the anatomy of Hindu society as a consequence of Muslim rule. Unfortunately there is a great lack of reliable evidence in this regard. Because, even though they might have acquired some knowledge of the ideals of the *varna* system from the Hindu religious texts, the Muslim scholars who sought to understand Hindu society did not observe the actual form taken by the *varna* system through the confrontation of ideal and reality. Similarly, they did not take into account the directions in which change was taking place as a consequence of the pressure of Islamic influence. For this reason, if we are to understand the history of society and the nature of the changes taking place in it, our purpose will not be served by the accounts written by the Muslim scholars.

A scholar named Kunwar Muhammad Ashraf published a long essay in 1935 in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* on the conditions and ways of life of the common people of North India for the period between A.D. 1200 and 1550, but there is little material in it that is required for our purpose. The few hints and indications that it throws serve to whet our appetite without providing any scope for its satisfaction.

It appears from what we learn about the entire period of Muslim rule that the economic life of the village flowed uninterrupted along the same course as in the past. In other words, as to the past, so also during Muslim rule, the Cultivator, the Oil-presser, the Blacksmith, the Weaver and the Mason earned his livelihood through the pursuit of his ancestral calling. In the towns, near where the princes and courtiers lived and under their patronage, one could see the pursuit of a few new crafts brought over from Persia or Central Asia. Porcelain work, enamelling, *bidri* work², various types of leather work, all began to develop in India at this time, but they did not and could not spread into the villages. The craftsmen and artisans who were brought for these purposes from outside did not transform these into hereditary pursuits in the Indian way, the new arts could be learnt, according to the opportunities available, by men of all castes, it does not appear that there were any restrictions of caste in these spheres.

But the ancient crafts continued to be governed by hereditary rights as in the past. Further, some castes did not change their old social customs even after adopting the religion of Islam. Until quite recently in Bengal the work of the Hindu Fisherman was to catch fish which was then sold by the Muslim Nik...i, each was reluctant to perform the other's work. Even today in East Bengal it is the Muslim Kolus and not other Muslims who work the oil mill, and in Muslim society too the Kolus are esteemed lower than the others. The condition of the Muslim Jolaha or Weaver in Bengal and Bihar was somewhat similar. In other words, productive arrangements in the village remained more or less unaltered during the period of Muslim rule.

We can see in certain cases some limited changes taking place in the ancestral rights over a craft in accordance with the requirements of the king. The Sultan Alauddin Khilji engaged seventy thousand stone workers in the royal establishment. It would

appear that these were Hindu craftsmen of the old régime. It also seems beyond doubt that Hindu craftsmen were engaged by Ilutmish at the beginning of the thirteenth century for building a mosque in Ajmere at the foot of the Taragarh hills. But there is proof that at a later time Feroze Tughlaq engaged four thousand of his own slaves in stonework. In other words, ancestral rights in stone work were overlooked in certain cases. There is also historical proof that Mahmud of Ghazni and Timur forcibly carried away stone workers from India to Afghanistan and Central Asia. While episodes of this kind might show the effect of external pressures on traditional arrangements, we may take it that these arrangements remained more or less unbroken. I will try to give an example from modern times of how a community of craftsmen tries to preserve its ancestral status and sentiments even after embracing Islam.

Conversions to Islam take place for various reasons. We leave aside those who are attracted to Islamic monotheism by conscious reasoning, or who change their religion by being attracted by the force of Islamic solidarity. I am speaking of cases of religious conversion occasioned by other causes. There is a village in Orissa called Garpada where the principalities of Mayurbhanj and Baleshwar have a common border. In ancient times a Brahmin family had its home here. King Purushottamdeb (1470-97) of the solar dynasty gave some land to this Brahmin family. When Orissa was conquered at the time of the emperor Aurangzeb, this grant to the Brahmin family was withdrawn. But when the Brahmins accepted the Islamic religion their property was restored to them, and they continue to enjoy it to this day. The copperplate grant of King Purushottamdeb is even now carefully preserved in their home.

As in the case of this Brahmin family, many families of craftsmen were constrained to accept religious conversion. Among those stone workers who turned from temple construction to the construction of mosques at the command of Muslim rulers, there must naturally have been some who were thrown out of caste and who later adopted Islam. I went to Benares once in October 1941. There after many enquiries I located in the Karanghanta ward a certain Muslim contractor called Babu Miyan. He came from an ancient line of craftsmen. He said sorrowfully that these days

people no longer engage them or show them any regard. At the same time no one else knows the exact difference between different temples, and how temples dedicated to the different deities should differ. In the past such matters were the responsibility of the families in which these crafts were pursued but now days people engage contractors educated in engineering schools for building temples, so he has been forced to send his son to such a school. There are old hand-written copybooks in their house in which the various features of temples are written out, yet it is doubtful if anyone will appreciate them in the future.

Babu Miyin has a certain pride in his calling and maintains the dignity due to the traditions of his craft — something which pleased me very much. In the course of conversation he said, 'Look, now nobody is a Hindu any more. You have built a Hindu university, but how much of Hinduism is there in it? The real thing is the structure of a building, not its outer dressing. The structure of the university is completely Christian, can you conceal its structure or alter its caste¹ by putting up a few temple spires or pillars on it, or by covering it with creepers?' (Listening to him, I felt I was in the presence of a born craftsman who had retained intact the full flavour of traditional learning.)

Changes in the Educated Sections of Hindu Society

Even though the economic backbone of the ancient varna arrangements remained relatively unbroken, we get evidence of various changes within society in its religious beliefs and practices. It would appear that, as in the case of certain families of craftsmen, changes had gone fairly far among certain people living in the towns or employed by government. And it is in reaction to this that we see a number of attempts at religious and social reform in India in the middle ages. Apart from the sects established by saints like Nanak, Kabir and Dadu etc., there were many others which sought to break up the Hindu social order and make it more liberal and democratic. There also came reformers like Raghunandan who, instead of leading Hinduism along the path of democracy, sought to purge it of all its historically accumulated impurities and to re-establish it in its pristine purity. This too we see happening at the same time.*

*Those who would like to know more about these religious sects will benefit by reading 'Bharatiya Upasak Sampradaya' by the late Akshay

The tremendous upheaval created in society by Chaitanyaadeva during Muslim rule was also beaten back more or less by the blows it received later at the hands of bigoted elements. It has already been said that the economic organization of the village remained in its ancient form. There the hereditary rights in one's occupation and the differences in status between families in the different crafts and services were preserved more or less unharmed. In the villages these were preserved even by the followers of the Muslim faith. I think that it is this that ensured the triumph of Raghunandan in regard to both social practices and religious beliefs. The ideas propounded by Lord Chaitanya remained confined to particular sects, they were not able to break down the intolerance embedded in society as a whole and usher in a new flood of life. The Vaishnavas were in effect transformed into a new caste.

Lord Chaitanya came into this world in 1485. A little before this the great saint Madhavendrapuri of the Madhva sect tried to bring in a new tide of devotional worship. Ishwarapuri was a disciple of Madhavendrapuri. The saint Advaita of Shantipur, having bathed in this tide of devotion, was trying to make it flow through the entire land. Feeling that he would not be able to accomplish this alone, he awaited the emergence of an avatar. When Lord Chaitanya revealed himself as the propagator of the new religion of his day, Advaita and Lord Nityananda, Roop and Sanatan Goswami all got together and sought to restore life to the Hindus through their united action. I have already tried to indicate how far their efforts succeeded. I will now close the present chapter by drawing a sketch of the society of that time.

A Sketch of Hindu Culture during Muslim Rule

Who can describe the treasures of Nabadwip?

A hundred thousand people bathe there in the Ganges
 Hundreds of thousands of the twice born live there,
 By the grace of Saraswati they are all very learned
 They all pride themselves on being great scholars,
 Even a boy holds debate with titled scholars
 People from many lands go to Nabadwip.

Kumar Datta or 'Jatibhed' by Principal Krishnamohan Sen. The reader will also find a fascinating analysis of the social system during the time of Raghunandan in 'Swami Vivekananda eban Unabimsha Shatabdi' by Shri Girija Shankar Raychoudhuri (author's note).

By studying in Nabadwip they attain learning
 So there is no dearth of students,
 There must be a million scholars there
 By the grace of Lakshmi they all live well,
 But they spend their time in futile worldly pleasures
 The whole world was devoid of devotion to Krishna and Rama,
 Thus it was in the first part of Kaliyuga
 By way of religious duties people knew only these
 They observed vigils with songs holy to Mangalchandi,
 Some in their vanity worshipped the snake goddess,
 Some constructed idols at great expense,
 Some squandered money on their children's weddings,
 In these ways people wasted their time
 Even scholars with titles like Bhattacharya Chakravarti and
Mishra

Were not aware of the true meaning of the books
 By teaching the scriptures all that they did
 Was to sink ensnared by the god of death along with their
audience
 They did not expound the faith of the age which is to sing the
praises of Krishna

They spoke only ill of others
 Even those who were detached ascetic or high minded
 Did not bring the name of Hari to their lips
 At most those who were very pious while bathing
 Took the names of Govinda and Pundarikaksha
 Even those who taught the Gita and the Bhagavat
 Did not expound the cult of devotion
 Thus, through the illusion created by Vishnu the world was in
a state of enchantment,

Seeing this the devotees worried in endless misery
 How were all these creatures to attain salvation ?
 The whole world was immersed in mundane pleasures
 No one took the name of Krishna even when asked to
 They flaunted endlessly their learning and their lineage

* * * *

Grieving at the lack of devotion in the people
 The whole world was intoxicated with mundane pleasures,
 No one cared for the worship of Krishna or devotion to Vishnu
 Some worshipped Basuh with diverse offerings,
 Some offered sacrifices with flesh and wine
 There was song, dance, music and commotion all the time,
 One never heard the blessed name of Krishna
 Worship without Krishna gave no pleasure to the gods,
 Advaita in particular felt very aggrieved
 Advaita's heart was by nature compassionate,
 Out of pity he pondered on the salvation of living beings
 If my lord were to arrive and become incarnate,
 Then alone would these creatures be saved
 Then only can I, Advaita Simha, justly take pride,
 If I can bring the lord of Vaikuntha here to this earth
 Having brought the lord of Vaikuntha to the earth,
 I shall take all living beings, singing and dancing, to salvation

Shreechaitanyaabhagavat, Adi Canto 2

At his advent, when the lord Chaitanya returned to Nadiya after his meeting with Shreeishwarapuri at Gaya, then onwards he began to preach to humanity to sing the praises of God and to follow the path of devotion

The lord says, let all acquire devotion to Krishna.
 Let none speak of anything but the merit of taking Krishna's name

The lord himself advises everyone
 Listen with joy to the great incantation that is Krishna's name
 Through this will all acquire every spiritual gain,
 There is no other way but to chant this all the time
 Let people sit in small groups at their door,
 And sing devotional songs, keeping time by clapping their hands

Having got the message from the lord's lips,
 Everyone bowed and returned to his home
 Everyone ceaselessly meditated on Krishna's name,
 And all meditated with heart and soul on the lord's feet
 At dusk they gathered together at their doorsteps,
 And they sang the praises of the lord, keeping time by clapping

Thus in town after town, the son of Sici,
 Introduced congregational chanting
 Once by chance the Kazi was passing that way.
 When he heard the music of drums, cymbals and conch shells
 Hearing on all sides the resounding name of Hari,
 The Kazi remembered his own scriptures
 The Kazi said, catch them today.
 We shall see what your Nimbacharya can do
 The townspeople fled in all directions.
 In great fear some forgot to tie their top knots
 The Kazi beat whomsoever he could catch
 Broke the drums and committed nuisance at their door.
 The Kazi said, Nadiya has gone Hindu
 If I catch them I shall give proper punishment
 By chance it is already nightfall, so I am letting them go;
 If I catch them another day, I shall make them lose caste.
 Thus everyday with his band of wicked men,
 The Kazi roamed the town, seeking out devotional performances
 Sorrowfully the townspeople kept themselves in hiding.
 The Kazi abused and persecuted the Hindus

Shreechaitanya abhagavat, Madhya Canto 23

In the meantime some Hindus — presumably the wealthier ones among them — in order to please the Kazi, complained openly against these religious practices. The Lord Chaitanya, taking all things into consideration, ignored the Kazi's injunction, and went to confront him at the head of a huge party of devotees. It is very likely that this was a procession of the common people, the wealthier ones being unwilling to risk a violation of the law, for the Kazi later said to the Lord Chaitanya

At this time a few ungodly Hindus arrived
 They came and said that Nimbai has undermined the religion
 of the Hindus,

We have never heard the devotional songs he has introduced
 We keep vigils for Mangalchandi and the snake goddess.
 There we have dances, songs, music and other appropriate rites
 Formerly this Nimbai pundit was alright,
 On returning from Gaya he has taken to perverse ways

Singing at the top of his voice, he claps his hands,
 We are deafened by the noise of drums and cymbals
 Intoxicated with heaven knows what, he dances, he sings,
 Laughs, weeps, falls on the ground, gets up, and then rolls over
 and over

The townsmen are maddened by the ceaseless devotional music,
 We cannot sleep, but keep awake at night
 Discarding the name *Nimai*, he now calls himself "Gaurhari".
 He has undermined the religion of the Hindus by starting a
 heresy

The lower orders are now singing the name of Krishna,
 Through this sin shall Nahadwip be destroyed
 In the Hindu scriptures the name of God is known to be the
 great incantation,
 If everyone hears it, the incantation loses its potency
 You are the master of the village, everyone is your subject,
 Summon *Nimai* and send him in exile

Srisrichaitanyacharitamrita, *Adi* Canto 17.

Notes

1 The traditional name for Bengal

2 A kind of enamelling, named after Bidar

3 Yet another interesting use of the term *jati*, here implying specific nature or quality

Trends of Change During British Rule

THE SYSTEM of production and exchange that arose in Hindu society on the basis of family occupations lasted for a very long time despite the exploitation and class inequalities inherent in it. It lasted because of the bonds of co-operation it provided, because there was room for establishing villages in new areas, because of the sale of handicrafts in foreign lands, and because of the independence allowed to each lineage or caste in the observance of its distinctive customs. We believe that during Muslim rule, despite some changes in the traditional arrangements in the vicinity of urban centres, these arrangements retained their permanent form in the villages, and until the middle of the seventeenth century India was able to attract much wealth through the production and sale of handicrafts in foreign lands.

For a few hundred years from the tenth century onwards India was invaded by Pathans, Turks, Mughals and other nations which were attracted to her by this wealth, similarly from the seventeenth century onwards, Portuguese, Dutch, French and British merchants were attracted to India and they sought to acquire wealth through new and more subtle means. During the two previous centuries there had been many changes in modes of production in Europe, and these also made their effects felt on the economic fortunes of India. Recently Shri Nirmalendra Sinha has made a concise and fascinating analysis of this in a valuable book called *Studies in Indo-British Economy Hundred Years Ago* which I recommend to the interested reader. But since our attention is focused

especially on the structure of Hindu society, we will review the history of the period under British rule from a different angle

Raipur

The river Ajay flows to the north of Burdwan district and along the southern border of Birbhum district. Rising in the hills of Bihar, it moves eastward and meets the river Bhagirathi near Katwa village. Both banks of the Ajay are very fertile. At one time it was along the Ajay that most of the commercial traffic of this region flowed. Prosperous villages had been established on its banks from ancient times. The shrine of Ichha Ghose was constructed probably in the ninth century. In Supur village, in Deuli, and also at other places many excellent stone images of gods and goddesses have been excavated. Some of these must have been installed during the rule of the Pala dynasty and others during the period of Sena rule. Supur village is situated not far from Bolpur town. At one time there was a centre of trade there. On account of the inflow of salt along the riverway, a portion of Supur village is even today widely known as Nundanga¹. To the west of Supur is Mirjapur, and adjacent to that is the village of Raipur. There are no ancient ruins in Raipur as there are in Supur, but, in discussing the history of Raipur, we will get direct evidence of the spread of British rule and of its impact on Hindu society.

The East India Company entered India on the pretext of trade. The French did the same, but they believed that in order to really profit from the disorder prevailing in India because of the weakening of Mughal rule and the consequent emergence of petty powers, it would not do to merely watch events. It would be necessary to enhance one's own political power by supporting one or another of the contending sides. The French went quite far in these efforts. Later, the British also followed their footsteps and joined the same game. In the struggle between the two powers, the British were ultimately victorious, and in course of time the East India Company got involved in other affairs more than in commerce. After taking charge of collecting the revenues for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the Company began gradually to turn its attention in other directions. At that time due to the general disorder and the misuse of political power, there were frequent famines, many people died and the economic life of the country was thrown into complete confusion.

In those days Birhhum was under the charge of the Muslim military governors of Rajnagar who adopted the title of 'Raja'. The economic condition of these people deteriorated as a result of the changes in their political fortunes. But the Sinha family was able to carry on its business in peace despite the general disorder prevalent in the country because of the protection provided by Cheap. They had accumulated vast quantities of wealth. In exchange for that wealth the ruling family of Rajnagar sold the zamindari rights to the entire area from Seuri to Raipur to the Sinha family. Those who had earned their living from the work done by their weavers now became transformed into landlords.

Lalchand's son was Shyamkishore. Shyamkishore's sons were Jagmohan, Brajamohan, Bhuanmohan and Manamohan. The eldest of the four sons looked after the zamindari. Bhuanmohan supervised the office-work, and Manamohan is believed to have spent his time in the cultivation of music and other arts. Manamohan had four sons and, among these, Sitikantha was the father of Shri Satyendraprasanna Sinha or Lord Sinha. Sitikantha, Shyamkishore and the others acquired a thorough knowledge of Persian in those days. Sitikantha also learnt English in addition to Persian.

The Sinha family ran its zamindari. In the meantime, the British traders began to set up, one after another, tea, sugar and indigo factories in the area. The British traders began gradually to introduce into India, independently of the East India Company, the improved techniques of manufacture which were emerging in Britain. With the help of Cheap, a Briton by the name of David Erskine began the cultivation of indigo a few miles to the west of Raipur. But Cheap died in 1828 and later, when David Erskine died in 1837, his son Henry Erskine started a new company and continued with the work of indigo cultivation. It is said that at this time Sitikantha Sinha of the Sinha family also joined them in their business. The British merchants made things easy for their business by getting an influential zamindar on their side. Sitikantha's zamindari went on, and his sons gave up the study of Persian in Calcutta and turned their attention to English. Sitikantha arranged for the education of his sons Narendra and Satyendraprasanna in England with the help of the Erskine family. The ruins of the indigo factories

operated by him may still be seen here and there in the nearby villages. Subsequently, Sitikantha's son Satyendraprasanna became a famous lawyer, and was later appointed as the first Indian governor of Bihar.

The zamindari of the Sinhas of Raipur exists even today³. But because of its being broken up into many branches and because of the limited possibilities of a proportionate growth in income from it, many members of the family have gradually been attracted to medicine, law and the civil service. Nor was there much hope of profit from the trade in indigo or handloom products.

If the Sinhas had remained in the calling to which they were assigned within the *varna* system, we would probably have not even heard their names today. But when the tide of events flowed on a different course under the impact of the British economic system, the Sinhas allowed themselves to be carried by it, taking sometimes to trade, sometimes to landownership, sometimes to factory management and sometimes to various occupations under Government. It was this very tide of change that tore the *varna* system asunder.

The Origin of Bolpur and Various Villages

Bolpur is not very far from Raipur, only three or four miles away. The commerce which flowed by boat along the river Ajay was displaced by the extension from Burdwan of the East Indian Railway, and began to move by rail. The little township which emerged around the commercial centre at the railhead of Bolpur has today grown into a flourishing town. Birbhum is a land of paddy. The price of paddy rose high after the Great War of 1914-1918. The rich profited greatly by the setting up of rice mills. Whosoever had any accumulated wealth tried to use it to set up rice mills or to invest in the rice trade in order to get quick profits. As a result, there are now over twenty rice mills in Bolpur, and one now sees in the neighbouring villages a large number of bullocks and bullock-carts which have to meet the needs of these mills. Those village women who formerly lived by husking paddy have now been reduced to distress. Because of the presence of a market town nearby, vegetable cultivation has increased in the vicinity of the river Ajay. Various associated changes of this kind may be seen all around.

What we have to consider are the changes in social organization that have come about as a result of all this. I give below a brief description of what may be directly observed in Bolpur. The social disorganization that has resulted from the loss of employment of a large number of women is not the only noticeable thing. It is true that the establishment of rice mills and the rise in the price of paddy has led to some increase in paddy cultivation all around, but today even the work of cultivation is regulated not by the demands of home consumption but by those of the market. The Tanner used to work on leather in the past, but now leather is sent for tanning to distant places. Even the work of the weavers is not regular or continuous because it has to depend on mill-made yarn. The weavers have had to sacrifice their independence to the demands of the mill-owners. Even the Blacksmith is not able to ply his trade successfully since so many articles are produced in the factories and sold cheaply in the markets. As a result, the various artisan families have lost their moorings. Some have become transformed into landless cultivators or labourers, and others have left their homes for an unknown destination.

The Tanner becomes an agriculturist, the Brahmin opens a pharmacy, Kayasthas, Sadgopes and Ugra Kshatriyas have at places entered service, at places started furniture factories and at places opened shoe shops. People have lost the confidence to adhere to the occupations which were assigned to them under the *varna* system. As a result, caste has become detached from the economic system and has become confined only to the ceremonial aspects of social life.

It is not as if such changes are taking place only in the towns and the markets. Even in the countryside, village society is being changed as a result of the economic and social revolutions described above. Before we try to find out in quantitative terms the direction of this change and, possibly, its rate, we would like to close this chapter with an account of the population and occupational distribution of a village in Birbhum district.

Jajigram

There is an ancient village called Jajigram in the north of Birbhum district near the border of Murshidabad district. Today

it has a population of 2,055 persons. We give below a table showing their numbers and their occupations.

The reader will notice that the Grahacharya, Kumor, Dom, Jele, Kamar, Chhutar, Napit and other castes are still more or less established in their traditional occupations. The Muchi has become a labourer, the Rajbanshi has given up fishing for wage labour, Brahmins, Kayasthas and Baidyas have turned their attention to cultivation. There is another thing we have to notice—the castes from which water is not acceptable account for 1,485 of the 2,065 persons, or, over 70 per cent of the people occupy a degraded position in society, and it is to this category that most of the wage labourers belong.

TABLE HOUSEHOLD CENSUS OF JAJIGRAM⁴

Group A Castes from Whom Water is not Accepted by Brahmins

Name	No. of Families	No. of Individuals	Traditional Occupation	Actual Occupation
Muchi	65	325	Tanning, shoemaking	Landless labour
Bhuimali	40	150	Sweeping, cleaning	T.O.,* landless labour, 2 peasant proprietors
Phulmali	7	25	Gardening, supplying flowers for religious offering	Landless labour
Rajbanshi	10	35	Boatmen and agricultural labour	Landless labour
Bhar	12	35	Mfg. of chapped rice, labour	T.O.
Mal	80	400	Agricultural labour	T.O.
Konai	15	350	do	T.O.
Bauri	1	5	do	T.O.
Dom	5	20	Working in bamboo (basket weaving)	T.O.
Kora Santal	25	65	Digging earth, labour	T.O.
Jele	11	55	Fishing	T.O., 2 peasant proprietors
Dhoba	2	10	Washing clothes	T.O.

* T.O. stands for 'Traditional Occupations'.

Group B Castes from Whom Water is Accepted by Brahmins

Name	No of Families	Individuals	Traditional Occupation	Actual Occupation
Goala	8	25	Milk trade and cow keeping	T O and farming
Sadgop	5	10	Farming	Landless labour
Kumor	4	10	Mfg Pottery	T O
Kamar	6	20	Blacksmithery	T O
Chutar	1	5	Carpentry	T O
Napit	7	30	Shaving and hair cutting	T O
Bene	2	5	Trading in spices	Trade and farming
Barai	40	200	Cultivation of betel vine	T O, 2 grocers, 3 unskilled physicians
Bhat	2	10	?	Clerical jobs
Kayastha	23	120	Clerical work	Farming, clerical job, 2 physicians, some unemployed

Group C High Castes

Name	No of Families	Individuals	Traditional Occupation	Actual Occupation
Rajput	4	15	Soldiers	Landless labour
Chhatri	6	15	Soldiers	Farming, clerical work
Brahman	30	150	Priestcraft, teaching, etc	Farming, clerical job, 1 physician, some unemployed
Grahaacharya (Brahman)	1	5	Astrology	T O
Vaidya	12	50	Physician	Farming, physician, clerical job, also unemployed
Bairagi (Vaishnava mendicant)	5	15	Religious mendicancy	T O, 1 in farming

Notes

- 1 *Nun* = salt, *danga* = land
- 2 The word used is '*nafrana*' which is a tax or tribute paid by an inferior to a superior
- 3 This was written before the land reforms.
- 4 This is a slightly more elaborate form of the table given in the book, and is taken from N. K. Bose, 'Some Aspects of Caste in Bengal', *Man in India*, Vol 38, No 2, 1958

The Present Position of The Caste System

THE ENUMERATION of the Indian population began in 1872. But the work of enumeration was incompletely done in that year. A complete census enumeration has been made every ten years since 1881. From all this we get various kinds of information about the different levels of Hindu and Muslim society for the years 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931. If we could get census data even for the areas ruled by the British since the beginning of British rule, it would be possible to present a complete picture of the changes that took place in Indian society during the last two hundred years. Let us discuss here the material that we get for the limited period of thirty or forty years.

We will have to depend for the present on the unpublished manuscript prepared by Priti Mitra in the course of her researches in the Department of Anthropology of the University of Calcutta.

If one carefully goes through the tables on the following pages one will notice certain things. Firstly, the castes which are mentioned in the census from 1901 to 1931, or in regard to which any analysis is possible, may be grouped into a number of categories. Baidyas, Brahmins and Kayasthas are castes which have a high proportion of literates. Among them the proportion of people in their traditional occupations is low, and the number in the higher professions is high. There is some association with agriculture in the case of Kayasthas, but the Brahmins and the Baidyas have not gone in for it. Their attraction to industry is also very weak.

BAIDYA, PHYSICIAN

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	31,357	88,298	102,870	110,739
Earners		21,133	24,174	26,292
Percentage of earners		23.93	23.44	23.83
Percentage of literates	45.62	53.21	57.52	51.79
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	36.10	20.11	15.02	18.80
agriculture, etc		7.16	12.42	6.04
industries		2.13	1.22	1.85
higher professions		54.66	46.81	49.40

BARUI, BETEL CULTIVATOR AND TRADER

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	72,183	101,112	185,526	195,139
Earners		30,934	56,422	50,754
Percentage of earners		30.68	30.42	26.01
Percentage of literates	12.90	15.29	20.32	17.39
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	94.96	61.18	44.15	54.58
agriculture, etc		75.31	70.74	73.68
industries		1.95	3.47	3.88
higher professions		2.07	3.76	8.67

BAURI, LABOURER

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	260,494	257,669	303,013	331,238
Earners		161,914	164,881	143,468
Percentage of earners		62.82	54.43	43.32
Percentage of literates	0.38	0.99	0.59	0.77
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	37.25	52.02	63.16	40.79
agriculture, etc		59.52	79.17	65.94
industries		8.21	3.00	4.07
higher professions		0.07	0.05	0.78

BRAHMIN, PRIEST, SCHOLAR AND TEACHER

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	1,019,348	1,191,867	1,314,430	1,456,180
Earners		400,064	425,173	417,157

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Percentage of earners		33 58	32 36	28 68
Percentage of literates	35 84	39 85	43 15	37 28
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	33 54	21 79	14 57	16 57
agriculture, etc		19 39	22 63	15 38
industries		2 92	3 57	4 50
higher professions		43 71	34 95	30 76

CHAMAR AND MUCHI LEATHERWORKER

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	96,391	533,131	564,872	564,862
	(only Chamar)			
Earners		238,058	244,145	217,366
Percentage of earners		44 67	43 21	38 50
Percentage of literates	3 19	2 97	3 11	4 52
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	23 26	33 77	23 94	24 59
agriculture, etc	33 47	32 33	28 60	32 88
industries		97 06	42 84	43 93
higher professions		0 25	0 45	1 07

DHOBA WASHerman

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	162,410	204,138	227,295	229,608
Earners		80,429	88,691	73,456
Percentage of earners		39 42	39 01	32 00
Percentage of literates	5 49	5 51	7 78	8 11
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	59 77	53 93	42 81	48 71
agriculture, etc		33 50	36 33	29 64
industries		3 82	4 21	5 41
higher professions		1 14	0 85	3 07

GOALA CATTLE HERDER AND MILK SELLER

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	404,699	583,790	582,597	599,281
Earners		251,829	239,429	217,438
Percentage of earners		43 13	41 10	36 28

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Percentage of literates	6 33	7 68	10 57	10 17
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	41 45	31 39	21 30	24 77
agriculture, etc		41 00	42 21	37 49
industries		6 47	7 43	7 28
higher professions		1 65	1 87	5 42

JOGI WEAVER

	1910	1911	1921	1931
Population	373,105	342,833	365,891	384,634
Earners		119,234	127,577	107,952
Percentage of earners		34 77	34 86	28 08
Percentage of literates	7 61	12 97	15 44	11 36
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	53 88	36 09	36 25	40 82
agriculture, etc		32 93	32 62	24 09
industries		42 47	40 23	49 41
higher professions		2 71	3 06	6 83

NAMASHUDRA CULTIVATOR AND BOATMAN

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	1,796,220	1,826,139		2,094,936
Earners		609,255		552,796
Percentage of earners		33 36		26 38
Percentage of literates	3 30	4 91	7 51	6 64
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	88 02	75 19		
agriculture, etc		77 49		70 45
industries		7 20		4 94
higher professions		1 09		6 03

NAPIT BARBER

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	334,954	427,488	444,023	451,085
Earners		150,860	151,037	133,898
Percentage of earners		35 30	34 02	29 68
Percentage of literates	9 79	11 01	13 47	11 58

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	60 55	48 41	36 70	45 41
agriculture, etc		33 95	32 29	27 01
industries		4 81	4 21	5 64
higher professions		3 28	3 23	7 45

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	703 147	847,228	886,821	987,315
Earners		392,472	371,477	366,455
Percentage of earners		46 33	44 15	37 13
Percentage of literates	1 57	1 91	2 13	1 92
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	70 13	71 28	42 28 (?) 69	79
agriculture, etc		73 41	68 66	81 74
industries		10 05	9 23 (?)	5 03
higher professions		0 25	0 36	1 17

	KAMAR	BLACKSMITH		
	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	176,873	238,595	256,853	265,526
Earners		86,902	89,633	81,710
Percentage of earners		36 38	34 59	30 77
Percentage of literates	10 34	14 98	17 88	14 91
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	47 35	57 48	34 11	43 76
agriculture, etc		19 30	26 02	21 81
industries		67 53	52 04	56 11
higher professions		1.75	1 29	5 32

	KAYASTHA	ACCOUNTANT AND SCRIBE		
	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	845,968	1,023,734		1,558,442
Earners		305,190		411,657
Percentage of earners		29 80		26 42
Percentage of literates	30 86	34 75	36 57	32 90
Percentage in				
traditional occupations		10 54		12 64

	1901	1911	1921	1931
agriculture, etc		33 83		20 23
industries		5 09		5 16
higher professions		21 35		22 42

KUMOR POTTER

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	195,533	278,206	284,513	289,654
Earners		92,659	75,326	53,506
Percentage of earners		33 32	26 48	18 47
Percentage of literates	6 56	8 04	10 18	9 66
Percentage in				
traditional occupations	75 16	73 80	61 69	58 87
agriculture, etc	16 60	13 40	19 76	19 89
industries		78 14	64 50	65 66
higher professions		0 86	1 29	4 26

Those castes which have a very low proportion of literates have adopted two or perhaps three directions of movement. The Chamars and Muchis have remained in their traditional occupations in a fair number, and a good many of them are in agriculture. They had practised a certain handicraft, when the demand for their traditional craft fell they turned towards other crafts, hence the number engaged in industries among them has increased. Because the Kamars have a higher proportion of literates than other artisan castes and because of their skills, even though their traditional occupations have declined, they have been able to turn to other industries without difficulty.

Among the service castes, i.e., the Washermen and Barbers, the number of persons engaged in their traditional occupations is not inconsiderable. Their movement towards agriculture is moderate, but their movement towards industries and professions is weak.

Castes like the Bagdi, Bauri, Namashudra, etc. remain without literacy as before, and the number engaged in cultivation and agricultural labour among them is quite high. We can regard their movement towards the professions or towards industries as very weak.

On the whole, we may say that the extension of British rule and the capitalist system has manifested itself differently among

the different castes. Those who were in service in the past continue to be in service today. Chaoge is most conspicuous among castes which were associated with crafts which have been most severely affected by the capitalist system. Because of the export of leather to foreign countries, the Muchis' trade has been ruined in large measure, they have to some extent given up their traditional occupation and taken to agriculture or wage employment in other industries. Because of the competition with foreign or indigenous mills the Jogis have to turn to cultivation, but because there is still a market for handloom cloth, they have not completely abandoned their traditional craft. Because of the cheapness of the pots made by the Kumars, they have not been driven out of the market by foreign industry even today, many Kumars earn their livelihood from their traditional calling.

We have learnt something by looking at society as a whole, we will now augment our knowledge of the present condition of Hindu society by discussing internal developments among the different castes in recent times.

Social Movements among Various Castes

The Jogis

The Jogi caste numbers nearly four hundred thousand persons in Bengal. Of these, in 1931, 22.08 per cent were in Tripura, 17.10 per cent in Noakhali, 11.83 per cent in Mymensingh, 9.82 per cent in Chittagong, 5.14 per cent in Bakherganj, 5.55 per cent in Dacca and 3.23 per cent in Khulna. The remaining 25 per cent or so are scattered among the other districts of Bengal. Weaving is regarded as the traditional occupation of the Jogis. The table on them given earlier shows that the percentage of Jogis in their traditional occupation was 53.88 in 1901, 36.09 in 1911, 36.25 in 1921 and 40.82 in 1931. If we study the trends of social change among the Jogis through quantitative shifts towards agriculture and other occupations, we can learn many valuable things.

The first signs of social awareness among the Jogis in modern times are seen in 1872. At that time some Kaibartas were made outcastes for having taken food in the homes of Jogis in a village near Calcutta called Andul Mauri. This led to agitation among the Jogis, and they placed before the Pandits' Association of the Sanskrit College the question "Are the Jogis pure or impure, and what should be their conduct?" The Pandits' Association declared the Jogis as being of 'good behaviour'¹. After this some Jogis began to wear the sacred thread, but this did not spread very far. In the Bhadra 1313 issue of the paper, *Jogisakha*, it was published that in A.D. 1877 in the month of Phalgun, seven

persons adopted the sacred thread in the village Lonsimha, in the month of Chaitra, 24 persons in Rajnagar, and in the following year only seven persons in Rajganj adopted it. In 1880 a book called *Jogi Samskara* was published by Bbaratchandra Shiromani

The first detailed enumeration of the different castes in Hindu society was made at the 1901 census. After that the Minto-Morley reforms were instituted in 1909, and at that time again the different castes became acutely conscious of their separate political rights. We get ample evidence of this in the history of the period after 1901.

Risley's inconclusive account of the Jogis in his book, *Traces and Castes of Bengal*, published in 1891 drew a letter of protest addressed to him on behalf of Jogi society. After the census of 1901 the Jogi Hitaishi Sabha was set up, but it ceased to function after some time. The paper *Jagisakha* was started in 1905 (Baisakh 1311), if we read the articles published in it we can get some evidence and indication of the direction of change in Jogi society. The purpose of *Jagisakha* was to establish unity among the Jogis by dissolving the distinctions of subcaste among them, to raise the social status of the caste, and to help in the spread of education, agriculture, trade and scientific training. The Swadeshi Movement drew the attention of the country to handloom weaving, and the Jogis saw in this an opportunity for improving their economic condition (*Jagisakha*, Ashwin 1313). A few other essays on the subject were also published, viz., "Craft Training" (Agrahayan 1312) "The Basic Requirements of Our Progress" (Baisakh 1313).

At the time of the Morley-Minto reforms in 1909, the scope and desire for advancement expressed itself in different ways among the different castes. We read in the *Jagisakha* of Bhadra 1315 (A.D. 1908) the view of a certain writer who comments "The selfish Brahmin no longer enjoys a monopoly of the fruits of national advancement, Western liberalism gives merit its reward." There was a special petition for jobs and scholarships on behalf of the Jogi caste in Shravan 1318 (A.D. 1911). In view of the desire to seek special favour with Government, an article appeared in *Jagisakha* (Bhadra 1321, A.D. 1914) as soon as the First World War began. It said 'In these hard days we may not all be able to sacrifice ourselves for the king who is like our father.'

but it is our duty to help those who are setting out to give their lives. Government knows that we are very peace-loving and loyal. There will never be such an occasion for showing our loyalty." Again in Jaishtha and Asadh 1322 (A.D. 1915), it said, "The indigent Jogi caste is for ever loyal, our guiding principle is to wish the king well. we are ever grateful to the British."

At the root of these expressions of devotion and obedience to the king was the hope of some political advantage and some economic advancement through jobs, etc. The interest in the spread of school and college education began to grow among the Jogis. In an article entitled, "Social Independence" in Ashwin 1312 (A.D. 1905), the lack of education was held specially responsible for the inferior position of the Jogi caste. We can get some indication of this from the titles of some of the articles "Education and the Lack of Unity" (Magh 1312), "Education" (Phalgun 1312), "Education is the Main Ladder of Social Advancement" (Bhadra 1313), "Efforts First, Success Later" (Kartik 1314), "Education" (Pous 1315).

An institution called Jogi Sammilani petitioned Government for grants (Jogisakha, Shravan 1318, A.D. 1911), a students' hostel was established in Mymensingh (Agrahayan 1321, A.D. 1914). Subscriptions were also raised for the benefit of the students. Perhaps because of all this there was some increase in literacy among members of the caste.

1901	...	7	61
1911	.	12	97
1921	.	15	44
1931		11	36

With some improvement in college education and in employment, the desire to raise their social status naturally made itself acutely evident in Jogi society. Researches into the ancient history of the Jogis began, and before the census of 1911 a book named *Bangija Jogyati* by Shri Radhagobinda Nath was presented to the Census Commissioner. Various articles also began to be published in *Jogisakha*.

- "Archaeology", (Baisakh, Jaishtha, Asadh, Bhadra 1312),
- "The Historicity of the Jogi Caste", (Ashwin 1327, Kartik 1328),
- "Ray of Light", (Baisakh 1330).

"Who You Are", (Magh 1317),

"Decline and Redress", (Bhadra 1327)

At the 1921 census the priests of the Jogi caste put forward the claim to be included among the Brahmins, in 1931 the entire Jogi caste claimed the status of Brahmins

As a result of the movement started by the Jogi Sammilani, the wearing of sacred threads became prevalent to some extent, but it did not spread according to expectations

With the claim to higher social status, the effort to bring about reforms within became increasingly strong in Jogi society. In *Jogisakha*, the essays, "The Sacred Thread Ceremony" (Bhadra 1321) and "The Introduction of the Sacred Thread" (Baisakh 1328) were published. In the issues of Baisakh 1318 and Jaistha 1320, the priests among the Jogis were urged to acquire true education and to make themselves fit for their vocation. Together with this, appeals were made for the abolition of subcaste among the Jogis, and attempts continued to be made for building up public opinion against child marriage ("Marriage Reform", Ashwin 1338, "Child Marriage", Baisakh Jaishtha 1312). The following articles were published on the education of women

"Our Duty to Womankind", (Agrahayan 1327),

"Women's Education", (Magh 1327),

"An Appeal to our Sisters", (Magh 1327),

"Will Not Women Become Human Beings?", (Bhadra 1330),

"The Problem of Women", (Jaishtha 1331)

There were two views on the question of widow remarriage. Despite the resistance of the traditionalists the progressive section of society succeeded in arranging some marriages for widows.

The kind of movement in Jogi society of which we get an indication above shows them to be more interested in competing with other castes for jobs and favours with Government than in improving their craft. In their efforts to improve their education and social practices, what we see is only their movement in the direction adopted earlier by the Brahmins and other upper castes. Although the traditional occupation of the Jogis was textile weaving we get little indication of improvement in that. Even when, during the *swadeshi* movement the craft of textile weaving seemed for a while to provide possibilities of economic advancement, the Jogis appeared not to be able to hold on to it in a permanent way.

In an essay published in Baisakh 1313 (A.D. 1906), it was said, 'As a result of the *swadeshi* movement, native cloth has won appreciation. We must follow this and achieve economic gains. If we learn to make use of the factory made handlooms and fly shuttles which are being imported, we will be able to weave beautiful textiles in very little time.'

But perhaps because of the uncertainties in the rise and fall of the textile trade, the Jogis had also to look in other directions. In the Baisakh 1321 (A.D. 1914) issue of *Jogisakha*, the question was raised whether those who had adopted the sacred thread could engage in the work of tillage. The answer was that people should move towards any craft or trade which offered possibilities of gain.

In discussing the recent history of the Jogi caste, we see how, although many remained in their traditional occupation, this artisan caste, in its effort to advance economically and socially, brought about reforms within itself and, in this process, followed the footsteps of the service oriented middle class groups like the Brahmins, Baidyas and Kayasthas. As a result of Western education, there was the effort to break down the barriers of subcaste and to build up a unified Jogi caste. But we also see that the caste consciousness, which was present in a subdued form before 1909 as a result of the unequal benefits enjoyed by the different castes, became much more manifest in later times.

Namashudra

In Bengal, and especially in East Bengal, wherever there are rivers and canals, one finds members of the Namashudra caste. Hindu society has always despised this agricultural caste, and has gone to the extent of treating its members as untouchables and making them live in separate hamlets on the fringes of the village. Besides agriculture, navigating boats is also a traditional occupation of the Namashudras.

The Jogis have to a large extent lost their traditional occupation, but the Namashudras have not changed theirs to that extent. Among them also there has been a small increase in literacy, and the aspiration to gain social status has in due course made itself felt. But one notes indications of a certain development among the Namashudras that did not take place among the Jogis. The Namashudras are not inconsiderable in number, and in districts like

Faridpur, Bakherganj, Khulna and Jessore there are large areas with extensive Namashudra settlements. Partly because of this and partly in reaction to the humiliations to which their educated sections were subjected by the caste Hindus, the Namashudras declared their caste to have a separate identity from Hindu society and claimed special concessions from Government. We will not discuss here the association called the Namashudra Hitaishini Samiti, or the various papers such as *Pataka*, *Namashudra Suhrid*, etc., but confine ourselves to only one subject.

An author by the name of Raicharan Biswas wrote in *Namashudra Suhrid* (January 1908):

We are of the Brahmin caste, perhaps because of anger or of envy many may be unable to like us, but, observing our Brahminical conduct through the ages, everyone agrees unanimously that the Namashudra caste is descended from the ancient sages, i.e. from the purest Brahmins. The second point is that our source of livelihood is the Aryan practice of agriculture, that glorious occupation of ancient and modern times.

A similar view has been expressed in a book entitled *Jatitattva O Namasya Kuladarpan*. The Namashudra caste earlier allowed the practice of widow remarriage, but with the claim to Brahmin status, a movement to discontinue widow remarriage also appeared.

The demand for education from the Namashudras began to increase progressively and in the April 1916 issue of *Pataka* it was said:

The little knowledge we have been able to acquire by the grace of the British regime has enabled us to realise who we are and what our strength is. A society made up of two and a half million people cannot remain asleep for ever. By the grace of the blind regime of the Hindus we have remained asleep in Hindu society all this time. Now by the grace of the egalitarian, democratic and very powerful British, we have awoken. Being bound by the laws of the petty-minded Brahmins, our voice could not reach even the temple precincts. But what have you to be anxious about? The British regime itself is the friend of the uneducated, the constant help of the poor, the hope of the backward communities will come to your aid.

In the Dacca District Gazetteer we read that on account of their antipathy to Hindu society and their gratitude to the British for

helping them in their education, the Namashudra caste did not agree to join in the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905. Two residents of Bikrampur, Nagarhasi Majumdar and Raghunath Sarkar, declared to the then Governor of East Bengal and Assam that the Namashudras owed full allegiance to the British, and that Government in its turn should meet their demands for concessions in education and employment. From the October 1907 issue of *Namashudra Sahrid* we learn that representatives of the Namashudra caste met the Governor and prayed that the British Government in India might remain for ever.

Caste among the Muslims

The kinds of social movements we see in Hindu society among the artisan or backward castes are not noticeable to the same extent among the higher castes. But we cannot say that they were not there at all. The Kayasthas sought at one time to establish themselves as Kshatriyas, and the Baidyas also made efforts to establish their claims to being Brahmin. But the intense desire for social reform that was natural to the untouchable castes or to castes from whose members water was not acceptable, did not make itself felt in the same form among Brahmins, Baidyas and Kayasthas who already enjoyed a position of honour in society. The so-called lower castes sought, while remaining within Hindu society, to raise their status by imitating the social customs of the upper castes, on the other hand, the demands of nationalism led to a certain loosening of the ties of caste among the Brahmins and similar groups. Earlier, inter-caste marriages caused much agitation in society, but when the country dedicated itself progressively to the movement for national liberation, the attitude against inter-caste marriages began to lose its rigidity among the upper castes.

In the meanwhile, as in Hindu society, so also in Muslim society some remarkable movements became evident. In 1934 (A.D. 1927), the former headmaster of Rajarampur High School, Mohammad Yakub Ali, B.A., published a small book called *Musalmanner Jatibhed* (Caste among the Muslims). Reading reviews of the book in various journals, one gathers that it was well appreciated, and indeed the book deserves appreciation. We will present to the reader some extracts from it. The reader will realise that the demand for independence, which was vaguely manifested among the Namashudras, appeared in a much sharper

form among the Muslims, leading to the possibility of crippling the national unity. The powerful divisive movements which drew sustenance from British rule was in some measure successful in crippling the faint efforts at the elimination of caste distinctions that were being made by the Brahmins and related castes under the inspiration of nationalism.

In reviewing *Musalmancer Jatibhed*, the paper *Saogat* wrote

Islam is the religion of equality — of universal brotherhood. Islam certainly does not support the erection of caste barriers in human society and the injunction to discriminate between high and low. What is more, the foundations of Islam have been built by destroying unequal divisions in society. There has not been much deviation from this Islamic principle in Islamic countries. But Muslim society in India is a case apart. Here the influence of their Hindu neighbours is strong, as a result, in imitation of the Hindus, the distinctions of caste have entered Muslim society also. Even though the most hideous Hindu extremes of pollution by touch may not have found place in Muslim society, their pride in the antiquity of lineage and their division of trades into high and low have gone far into it. The weavers who live by weaving and the Nikaris who live by selling fish and many other Muslim functional groups have thus, without reason, been forced into accepting a certain position in society. As a result, even in the egalitarian Muslim society, two classes, Ashraf and Atraf, have been created.

In his hook, Mohammad Yakub Ali writes

In the account of the 1911 census we can see that the authorities in Bengal have enumerated the population of the followers of Islam and their various sections by dividing the Muslims into Sheikh, Sayyad, Moghul, Pathan and other large and small castes numbering eighty. But such caste division among the Muslims of this country appears to be a unique phenomenon because in no other country in the world does one find the prevalence of such caste divisions in Muslim society (p. 1).

I extract the list given in the Appendix (1) Abdal (2) Ajlaf (3) Akhunji, (4) Bediya (5) Behara, (6) Beldar, (7) Bhat, (8) Bhatiya, (9) Chatuwa, (10) Churihar, (11) Dafadar, (12) Dai, (13) Darji, (14) Dewan (15) Dhawa, (16) Dhoba, (17) Dhuniya or Dhunkar, (18) Fakir, (19) Gayin, (20) Hajjam, (21) Jola

(22) Kagaji, (23) Kalan, (24) Kan, (25) Kasbi, (26) Kasai, (27) Kaji, (28) Khan, (29) Khondkar, (30) Kolu, (31) Kumar, (32) Kunjra, (33) Lalbegi, (34) Mahiferush, (35) Mahimal, (36) Mallah, (37) Mallik, (38) Masalchi, (39) Mehtar, (40) Meer, (41) Mirja, (42) Muchi, (43) Moghul, (44) Nagarchi, (45) Naniya or Nanuwa, (46) Nasya, (47) Nat, (48) Nikari, (49) Pathan, (50) Pawariya, (51) Peerkodali, (52) Rasuwa, (53) Saiyad, (54) Sheikh, (55) Sonar, (56) Other Lesser Castes (a) Afghan, (b) Ashraf, (c) Bakh, (d) Bakho, (e) Bari, (f) Bhuiyan, (g) Chaudhuri, (h) Chunari, (i) Dafali, (j) Gaddi, (k) Golam, (l) Halalkhor, (m) Hija, (n) Hosseini, (o) Kharadi, (p) Koreshi, (q) Lahori, (r) Mangta, (s) Mohana, (t) Meerdeh, (u) Miriyasin, (v) Miyan, (w) Naemoslem, (x) Pateya, (y) Sunoi (p 59)

After sharply criticising the listing of Muslim castes, the author says

But it will be shortsighted to blame only the census authorities for devoting space to the discussion of caste among the Muslims in this country. We can also see the ignorant and illiterate Muslims of this country trying to introduce caste distinctions among themselves in imitation of their Hindu neighbours. The reason behind this is that as a result of their living together with Hindus for centuries, the Hindu influence has gained ground in Muslim society. On the other hand, because the Muslims are in general uneducated, they have strayed away from the Islamic ideal. Furthermore, those who have recently abandoned Hinduism to join Muslim society are, due to the long influence of family traditions, also seeking to introduce caste distinctions into the egalitarian Muslim society. Hence it is the Hindu influence which is at the root of this un-Islamic ideology of discrimination in Indian Muslim society (p 16)

In describing the evil effects of the principle of discrimination, the author says

If the un-Islamic practice of caste discrimination is introduced into the egalitarian Muslim society, the Muslims will become involved in strife and mutual hostility out of envy and spite, and, as a result of this social strife, the Muslims will lose their unity and become weak and impotent. In their present stage of decline, the Muslims occupy a very low position in the Indian

body politic, and, although deprived of political power for only a hundred and fifty years, they are regarded by their former subjects as being worthless and contemptible. If in these circumstances there is social disunity among them, they will, being rendered utterly helpless, be degraded and persecuted by those powerful forces which seek their destruction, and they will then have to suffer the lot of Israel in captivity under the Pharaohs (p. 19).

In Bengal just as the Muslim converts who took to trading in fish began to be labeled as *Nikari* after the Hindu fashion, among other Muslim converts also, Hindu titles such as *Biswas*, *Mandal*, *Pramanik* etc., began to prevail. But it is because these Muslims have not in this matter been able to follow in full the injunction of Islam that until now one sees the widespread use of Hindu titles among them. Functional titles such as *Jola*, *Kolu*, *Chasha* etc., are also being used in Muslim society to signify the degraded distinctions of caste as among the infidels, hence it is necessary to put a stop to the prevalence of these titles as well (p. 37).

Today, the Hindus having advanced educationally and otherwise, the Brahmins, Kayasthas and other superior Hindus are doing trade in fish in utter disregard of the restrictions of *varna*. And the egalitarian Muslims, partly because of having fallen into blind ignorance, are discontinuing social relations with Muslims trading in fish, regarding as despicable this trade which has been praised in the Koran (p. 34).

Today many Hinduised, ignorant Muslims turn their noses at the idea of having marital relations with those Muslims who engage in agriculture. And in imitation of the Hindu caste system, refuse to interdine or sit together with other Muslims. In some places it is even seen that Muslims who pride themselves on their lineage, endow *jagirs* to Muslim students, and, discovering later that they are sons of *Chashas*, *Nikaris*, *Kolus* or *Jolas*, save their family honour or *sharafat* by expelling them. Not only that, but those *ulemas* who are described in the Hadis Sharif as the *khalifa* of the Nabi Karim, being born into families devoted to the practice of agriculture, they are unprepared even to read the *names* behind them! Seeing and hearing all this, one wonders whether these upstart *ashraf* of Bengal are not really descendants of the Brahmins! It is doubtful if the pettiness of

hypocrisy can sink lower than this. These illiterates should open the Koran and the Hadish and see that there is no place for their hypocritical pretensions to nobility in Muslim society (p 39)

The good thing is that after the Hindu-Muslim conflict of 1946 one hears that in East Bengal trades such a fishing, betel cultivation, shaving, laundering etc, which the Muslims did not follow, they are now taking up in the interest of communal unity and progress

In other words, we see efforts at reform within Hindu society for liberation from the hereditary division of occupations on the basis of which India had at one time prospered in manufacture and trade and which survived in the rural areas despite being partially affected in the cities after the inception of Muslim rule, but which broke down under the impact of British capitalism. We also observe keen efforts within Muslim society to free itself from the stranglehold of this system. Everyone is seeking to achieve freedom by breaking down hereditary occupational rights, everyone is seeking to strike at the root of the unequal ranking of traditional occupations and to attain for himself the status enjoyed by the highest caste

Notes

- 1 In other words, the Association gave them a certificate of good conduct which, in the circumstances, is probably the only thing they could do

Conclusion

We have entered deep into many aspects of reality in order to understand the design of Hindu society. We have an ancient history which deals with many men. It is very difficult to describe in a few words the system of social organization in India or to discuss its development briefly. In spite of this, we have tried to present as much fact and analysis as possible in order to acquaint the reader with the complexity of Hindu society and the direction of its movement. If the erudite reader is able to find in this some new line of enquiry or some new food for thought, we shall consider ourselves grateful. I shall now try to present the main features of the picture that has emerged in the foregoing essays before taking leave of the reader.

The first thing that strikes one is that Indian society is made up of the union of many communities. The same thing happens in other countries as well, and conquered nations often lose their political and economic autonomy as a result of the influence of their conquerors. A new system of production and exchange is created out of the exploitation of the one by the other. Then with the passage of time new modes of production are designed, and once again there are changes in the relations among men. It is not that this did not happen in India. This is what happened in India too, but here also the genius of India expressed itself in a unique way, as a result of which, despite the frequent rise and fall of kingdoms and the many changes in her fortunes, India was able to save its own culture from destruction.

We see this design in the *varna* system. According to the social philosophers of ancient India, the *varna* system was applicable to all societies. Wherever many communities have come together, it

is possible to group them into the four fundamental *varnas* and from their union to build a larger society. If, in accordance with the needs of society and in keeping with their own qualities and talents, people perform particular tasks and remain engaged in them and if society takes the responsibility to protect such people or their successors from starvation, each will seek co-operation with the others and the solidarity which will grow out of this co-operation will lead to a particularly cohesive society. There was, in addition to this kind of co-operation, another feature of village society which was a source of special assurance to men. No matter what culture one was accustomed to, no matter what the customs of one's lineage or caste, one could find a place in Hindu society even while retaining these customs. Only, when they included cow-slaughter, human sacrifice or other customs repugnant to Brahminical society, they were made to undergo refinement.

The economic system which was the backbone of the *varna* order and the assurance which many communities received about the practice of their own ways of life were responsible for the absence of revolts by the vanquished in Indian society, even if such revolts occurred they did not go very far. At the same time, there is no reason to believe that Brahminical society gave no cause for opposition or revolt. We get clear evidence of the victors having done in Indian society what they do everywhere. The victors, in the pursuit of their own class interest, shifted the burden of labour again and again onto the Shudra *varna*. Even when they gave a place to the priests of the vanquished communities in the Brahmin *varna*, they assigned them to the lower ranks in it, and deprived the lower strata of the opportunities of higher learning and the practice of religious sacrifices. No doubt the Shudras sought to enter the protected areas of the twice-born in secret, but the result of this was that they met the fate of Shambuk¹.

The enormous vitality that was released at a later period when Lord Buddha gave recognition to the right of the Shudras and of women to liberate themselves, whose creative fruits were manifested in sculpture, in art and in religious movement — from all this we can see how much creative force had remained concealed and unrecognized in the hidden depths of society.

At the same time there is no reason to believe that the Brahmins had only evil designs. We cannot but wonder at the tolerant

spirit and organizational skill which they showed in establishing the economic backbone of the caste system and in recognizing other people's rights to their own customs. The sad thing is that they never succeeded in giving to the vanquished a place equal to their own. This poison of discrimination gradually weakened and debilitated the entire body of the composite society. In such a society the different communities could not unite to ward off the attacks of external enemies. The larger unity of the composite society did not catch the imagination of the people, each pursued his narrow sectional interest and in the end tied the whole of Hindu society to the chains of bondage.

The ideal of union on which Hindu society was constituted and the attempt to establish the productive system on the basis of family or caste occupation was never fully realised in practice. Instances of transformation of one caste into another are not rare today and were not rare in the past. New castes arose because of change of occupation, migration from one place to another, and dehersement or purification of customs, but the two fundamental principles were accepted by all. Nobody opposed the freedom to follow one's own customs and the right of a family or caste to its particular occupation.

Hence when state power took a different course during Muslim rule, and the educated, service oriented people sought the favour of the Muslim administration, Hindu civilization survived because in rural society the backbone of the caste system remained unbroken.

There was no lack of enthusiasm even among the poor, exploited and oppressed Shudra castes for preserving the occupation-based *varna* system, for observing the rules of pollution, and for maintaining the distinctions of high and low. Even today when the movement for abolishing untouchability is on, the Hari, Dom, Bagdi and other castes, while intent on gaining equality of status with Brahmins and Kayasthas, are not eager to change the traditional relations among themselves. In other words, the attachment to the caste system has not declined sufficiently even among the exploited.

There is no point in merely blaming the cunning designs of the Brahmins for this, rather, in analysing the roots of this division and the basic causes of the absence of any revolt, one can see that each caste, whether high or low, remained by and large satisfied

within the integrated Hindu society because of the economic security and the assurance to follow its own customs that it enjoyed. When Nanak, Chaitanya or Rammohan sought to replace discrimination by social equality and the identity of caste by individual merit and aptitude, not merely the Brahmins but people in general thwarted their efforts at reform by transforming these groups into castes within the wider Hindu society. We have transformed the Vaishnava into another caste called 'Boshtom'. We have also transformed the Sikh and the Brahmo communities more or less into new 'castes' whose members marry generally among themselves.

We cannot escape by attributing all this to either the cunning of the Brahmins or the superstition of the Shudras. We cannot evade the responsibility of scientific analysis by saying that the absence in India of the kind of social revolution that took place elsewhere was due merely to the lack of national vigour. The root of it is to be found in the attachment of the general masses to the *varna* system. The stability of Indian civilization was made possible only by the stability of the economic centre of gravity of the caste system. It is most important to understand this fundamental truth.

The ancient economic system of India began to lose out in the competition with the new western productive arrangements throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although the right to one's traditional occupation might be conceded even today through force of habit, in the case of the majority of castes and in virtually every village in the country, the old productive arrangements were to a greater or lesser extent thrown into disorder. And it is in reaction to this that the attachment to the *varna* system which prevailed in the past is now being rapidly eroded. It is not true that the idea to reform society has come to us solely from English education. That is only part of the truth. If men could live in peace and prosperity under the shelter of their traditional calling, they would not, in spite of learning English, try to break up the caste system. The educated sections of Indian society once took to Persian but even though this might have resulted in some changes on the surface of society, the changes did not reach down to its depths. Not only this. It is widely believed that many members of the lower strata

embraced Islam because of their exploitation and humiliation by Hindu society. But personally I do not find this argument convincing. Why did those who changed their religion in order to escape the clutches of inter-caste discrimination continue even after the coming of Muslims to maintain distinctions of high and low and the hereditary rights in their occupation in village society? It is likely that they became Muslims for other reasons. That is probably why the weight of the economic system of Hindu society did not allow the egalitarianism of Islam to assert itself fully among the converted Hindus even during Muslim rule.

Only today it cannot do this any more. And I have also said that the reason for this is the failure of the old economic system.

It has been said in the *Gita* that the true nature of things is concealed by ignorance even as fire is covered by smoke. Today we are highly critical of Western capitalism, we wish to save humanity from the social inequality and exploitation inherent in it. But we cannot deny that Western capitalism has made the productive forces of the world yield richer fruits even while nurturing the desire for gain and individual self-interest. We might be able to absorb the instruments of the Western economic system while modifying its mode of operation, and in this way circumvent its evil aspects. If there is something of value in its foundations, we should not reject it, rather should we try to fashion a new ornament out of the precious material that there is in the old.

The same thing may be said about the caste system. The exploitation and degradation of humanity were no doubt tied up with it. But there was also an idea at the root of the caste system that man is subservient to society. The Blacksmith, Potter, Washer man, Barber, Brahmin or Astrologer makes his living by serving society in the prescribed way. They attend to society and society attends to them. Rights and obligations are inextricably tied. Furthermore, different castes, different lineages, even different individuals have the right to follow their respective ways of life. There is no doubt that it was on the basis of these two principles that Hindu society achieved the unity through which it was able to make India rich and advanced.

I have also said what was at fault with this unity. But it will not be right to turn our eyes away from its virtues merely

because of its faults. Apart from class exploitation, the Indian productive system also became a victim of inertia. It may be that men's fundamental self-interest has again found room for expression under the influence of Western capitalism and is now destroying the inertia of the old arrangements. One poison can be destroyed only by another. The quality of darkness that is there in the inertia of the caste system is being destroyed by a combination of the forces of darkness and valour.² But, struck by the scope for individual freedom and higher productivity, we should not be led into the belief that what we are leaving behind is all dross. That too had its nuggets of gold to which I have tried to draw the reader's attention.

In this modern Indian society which is being built on a corrupt form of capitalism we will have to say anew that man is indebted to society. We may not acknowledge that debt in the same form in which it was acknowledged by the ancients, but in a different form. But indebted we are, and it is only by acknowledging this debt that we can establish our rights. May we never forget this ancient truth.

Secondly, we must acknowledge the claim of individual freedom. The ancient lawgivers, while giving people rights in their own ways of life, recognised this claim, and they also instituted a system of astonishing quality. So long as man remains in society, he is subservient to society. No doubt he has the freedom to practise the customs of his particular lineage or locality, but he does not have the freedom to abandon his trade. But the ancient Hindus recognised another principle over and above this bondage. The man who adopts *sannyasa* and becomes a wanderer is free from the last obligation that the householder has to his hearth. He performs the final sacrifice and makes the last offerings to his soul with his own hands. After this his ties with his life before are severed, his name and his lineage are abandoned and he travels, homeless. Society makes no claims on him, he too can accept only alms and nothing more from society.

In other words, while we see in the ancient caste-based Hindu society the design for making the individual completely subservient to society, we also see that the ancients had created an arrangement for protecting the individual from destruction and

for allowing expression to his fundamental genius by allowing him to escape through the backdoor of *sannyasa* and stand in freedom under the open sky

If in assessing ancient Indian society, we look not merely at the exploitation in it, but, in a scientific spirit, see this exploitation for what it is and at the same time rescue whatever there is of value in it, only then will our investigation be truly fruitful

We shall not revile Western capitalism. Where it has helped human society in its material advancement, we shall give it due praise. But we should also remain aware of the damage it has done through excess of individualism. So also when we encounter what is offensive in the traditional caste system, we should not spare it. But if we find something valuable in the ancient system of production and of social solidarity, or of regulating the relationship between man and society, something which we may be able to put to use, we should certainly accept it

Today as a reaction against the fundamental egocentrism of capitalism, we are moving rapidly towards sociocentrism. The enthusiasm for this has created a new possibility by which individualism will be narrowly restricted in the interest of creating something like a society of ants. But a society built on a crippled individualism can never help in the true expression of man's quality. Perhaps we may be able to collect from the experience of ancient India some principle that will save us from this fate. Thus if, through the scientific analysis of history, we view things calmly, dispassionately and with a clear mind, we may be able to penetrate the smoke which envelops every activity and discover the burning truth beneath it

At various places and times men have made many attempts, many designs to create a new society, have tested many truths and sought to make people happy by devising a lasting design for society. If we can penetrate the smoke that was there in traditional society in India and use the burning flame beneath it for the happiness of mankind today, then our knowledge will achieve its purpose

There was a time in the history of man when the river banks were covered with forests. Those forests are no longer there but the combustible substance that is stored in the tree undergoes many upheavals within the earth and is finally transformed

into coal. We do not discard it as being the residue of ancient trees, rather, we use this coal for achieving many ends in the civilised world. The days when the ancient *varna* system was devised will never come back. Even if they do come back there will not be much advantage, for the number of men has increased, at least in India the amount of land per man has diminished enormously. Even so, if we can discover in the institutions of those times some principle, some design which may be applied to the present, and we do not use it in spite of its applicability, this will be only an expression of our folly.

The unity of mankind cannot be broken up by space or time.
Ekamevaaditiyam

Notes

1 See Chapter 5

2 Bose frequently used a classification based on the three traditional qualities or *gunas* of *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (valour) and *tamas* (darkness).